

JOHN GOWER

# DISPUTATIO

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JOHN GOWER  
Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts

Edited by

Malte Urban



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Of hem that writen ous tofore  
The bokes duelle

—*Confessio Amantis*, ll. 1–2



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## PREFACE

And for that fewe men endite  
In oure englissh, I thenke make  
A bok for Engelondes sake

— *Confessio Amantis*, Prol.22–24

John Gower's decision to write his third major narrative poem largely in the medium of English was timely indeed. The late fourteenth century saw a flourishing of literature composed in the vernacular, including, of course, the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and the showings of Julian of Norwich. Gower's poetry was clearly highly regarded while he was alive (not least by Chaucer, despite his apparent criticisms of it) and in the decades after his death (judging from the number of manuscripts that have survived) and it continued to be praised from the fifteenth century through to the eighteenth. The recovery of Gower's literary reputation and the steady growth of his popularity amongst scholars and students in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century can be explained in part by a greater interest in and understanding of the late-medieval vernacular politics. At the same time, Gower's works regain significance with the recent renewed academic focus on manuscript production and transmission, especially in relation to the London book trade. Equally important, however, is the way new theoretical approaches have offered radical insights into the complexity of Gower's work. *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, a product of all these critical trends, represents a further significant milestone in contemporary Gower studies. The volume pays particular attention to issues of readership and reception, editing, commentating, and translating. Given the centrality of ethics, morality, and education to the *Confessio Amantis*,

it rightly pays attention to the philosophical, rhetorical, and textual traditions within which the poem situates itself. At the same time, the volume takes seriously Gower's claim to be writing a poem 'for Engelondes sake' and focuses on the political and historical contexts of *Confessio Amantis*, and, in relation to London and Southwark, the politics of location. If 'fewe men' wrote in English in the later Middle Ages, then still fewer women were able to write in any language. Nevertheless, reflecting the recent impact of feminist and sexuality theory on the field of Gower criticism, matters of gender are addressed throughout the volume, with consideration given to women as readers and their literary representation and poetic significance. This volume not only reveals that much exciting and innovative critical work is currently being done on Gower's poetry, but it also opens up the field for further research and scholarly debate. The publication of *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, is then to be celebrated because it signals that Gower studies are at last entering their renaissance.

Diane Watt

## INTRODUCTION

Malte Urban

The essays in this volume approach the works of John Gower from a variety of angles that are to a large degree informed by the multiplicity of discourses contained in Gower's texts. For centuries, Gower stood in the shadow of his contemporary and friend, Geoffrey Chaucer, but since the late 1960s critics have once again begun to appreciate his sophisticated poetics and fairly unique position within late medieval literary culture. The manuscript tradition of Gower's work, his position within the linguistic triangle of Latin, French, and English in Ricardian England, and, last but not least, his outspoken politics have led to recent reappraisals of his works that continue to shed new light on late medieval culture and are beginning to inform readings of other writers' works. This volume gives an account of current criticism that, it is hoped, will open up further inroads into reading not only Gower's works but also those by his contemporaries and successors.

The resurgence in interest in Gower's works coincided with the dissolution of traditional disciplinary boundaries and an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to the humanities. Given the multiplicity of discourses contained in Gower's works, this link is not at all surprising. The opening up of literary studies and the inclusion of other disciplines' approaches, both neighbouring and further afield, has served to refocus the critical lens of literary criticism. Whereas earlier approaches to Gower's works were occasionally either baffled by the sheer polyvocality of his writings or dismissed his texts as considerably less innovative than those by his contemporary, Chaucer, we are now in a position from which we can finally appreciate the full spectrum of Gower's poetic, political, philosophical, and innovative achievements. In this sense, Gower's works illustrate nicely the ongoing dialogue between critical approaches and their objects; as critical discourses evolve, our understanding of our objects of study improves and

reciprocally serves to further develop the archive of critical apparatuses we have at our disposal. It is this tiered dialogue that this volume highlights and aims to further.

Critical attention to Gower's works gathered new momentum with the publication of John H. Fisher's *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* and Russell Peck's reading of the *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>1</sup> These two monographs opened up the field for a number of studies published throughout the 1980s, including a multifaceted collection of essays edited by Alastair J. Minnis,<sup>2</sup> as well as a regular Gower presence at major international conferences and congresses. The two collections of papers first presented at the sessions of the John Gower Society at the International Medieval Congress at Kalamazoo have begun the ongoing process of making current work on Gower available to a wider audience while highlighting the multiplicity of possible readings of his poetry.<sup>3</sup> Other work includes the publications of the John Gower Society, providing monographs on a variety of aspects of Gower's poetry that have opened new ways of looking at his major works within their cultural context.<sup>4</sup>

The recently published *Companion to Gower* contains a valuable sample of essays on all aspects of Gower studies, covering, among other themes, manuscripts, Gower's life, and issues of gender.<sup>5</sup> It is now possible to identify at least three different but interrelated strands of criticism. First, there is the aspect of manuscript production, ownership, and tradition, central to our understanding of Gower's works because of his apparent concern and involvement in the production of his poems.<sup>6</sup> Second, our understanding of Gower's poetics and

<sup>1</sup> John Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965); Russell A. Peck, *Kingship & Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Alastair J. Minnis, *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> See the essays in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), and *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> See María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000); Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the 'Confessio Amantis'* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992); Robert F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See Derek Pearsall, 'Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*', in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer,

politics must account for the ethics informing the texts and their relationship to both Aristotelian philosophy and current work on ethics and ethical criticism.<sup>7</sup> Third, exciting new developments in literary theory are beginning to prompt readings of Gower's poetry that are informed by an eclectic collection of theoretical approaches.<sup>8</sup>

Gower's utilization of various discourses is, of course, motivated by his immediate geographical and sociopolitical context. It is significant that Gower spent most of his literary career living in Southwark, 'a contested space, simultaneously in the city and outside it'.<sup>9</sup> Southwark thus echoes the familiar illumination from *Vox Clamantis* manuscripts of Gower pointing an arrow at a globe, an image that informs much of Gower's social criticism, as we will see in the following chapters. Life in Southwark, 'an administrative jungle',<sup>10</sup> undoubtedly also raised Gower's awareness of division in society, certainly the main theme that runs through all his major poetic works. It is true that Southwark as a social and geographic area does not feature directly in Gower's poetry, but the poet's experience of the heterogeneous society bustling around his chosen abode, combined with his earlier experience of the legal profession across the river Thames in London, certainly provided him with much of the raw material for the wide-ranging social criticism in his poems.<sup>11</sup>

With regard to Gower's living-quarters within the Priory of St Mary Overeys, we have much less evidence on which to base our conclusions. For one, we cannot ascertain with a high degree of certainty what prompted Gower to take up quarters within the priory's boundaries. A long-running theory assumes that one of the main motivations behind Gower's move was the double presence of a monastery library and a scriptorium. However, critics have cast doubt on Gower's

1989), pp. 13–25; Siân Echard, 'Gower in Print', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 115–35; A. I. Doyle and Malcolm B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by Malcolm B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar, 1978), pp. 163–210.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent comparison of ethics in the works of Chaucer and Gower, see J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See, especially, Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster', p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster', p. 53.

reliance on the priory's scriptorium for the production of manuscripts of his poems.<sup>12</sup> It now seems much more likely that at least the extant copies of his major works were produced within the then burgeoning trade of professional or semi-professional scribes, just as were the works by his two contemporaries, Chaucer and Langland.<sup>13</sup> We can, however, be quite confident that the priory provided Gower with a very specific environment in which to produce his texts. As Epstein proposes,

It is easy to imagine Chaucer reading his envoys to a group of London friends as post-prandial entertainment. It is easier to imagine Gower scribbling his verses alone in a monastic cloister — which, in fact, he probably did.<sup>14</sup>

Although we should not automatically assume that Gower led a completely secluded life in the priory (he certainly left it regularly, if only to share work in progress with Chaucer), Epstein's image of the solitary poet scribbling away in his cloister has a certain appeal. I would argue that this relative seclusion contributed greatly to the fact that Gower's works are far more homogenous than those of Chaucer, for example.

Gower's works are extraordinary in their degree of apparently authorial revisions that can be traced through the extant manuscripts. This manuscript tradition of Gower's works is central to our understanding of medieval manuscript production and transmission. Some fifty manuscripts are extant for the *Confessio* alone, covering the range of authorial revisions undergone by this poem.<sup>15</sup> This obviously has implications for modern-day editorial approaches to Gower's works, and also throws light on the ways in which individual manuscripts were adapted to specific commissioning buyers. Beyond the manuscripts, the current proliferation of readings of Gower's works highlight the heterogeneous

<sup>12</sup> See Fisher, *John Gower*, pp. 59–60, pp. 116–27; A. I. Doyle and Malcolm B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by Malcolm B. Parkes and Andrew G. Watson (London: Scolar, 1978), pp. 163–210 (p. 200).

<sup>13</sup> See Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Steven Justice, 'Scribe D and the Making of Ricardian Literature', in *The Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 2001), pp. 217–37; Doyle and Parkes, 'The Production of Copies'; Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster', pp. 44–45.

<sup>14</sup> Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster', pp. 47–48.

<sup>15</sup> For an important revision of G. C. Macaulay's classification of manuscripts according to Gower's revisions, see Peter Nicholson, 'Gower's Revisions in the *Confessio Amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 19 (1984), 123–43.

forces at work in late fourteenth-century culture. In this respect, Gower's works are not only illuminating for literary studies, but also for other disciplines, such as social, political, and art history.

The first section of this volume covers various aspects of manuscript studies: editing, glossing, and illustration and ownership/translation. Russel Peck offers an account of the intersections between current editorial practice and Gower's poetic practice, arguing that Gower shows a marked awareness of textual transmission and the implications for the production of texts. Building upon this, Andrew Galloway examines the glosses found in Gower manuscripts and compares these to those found in the *Prick of Conscience*. Galloway argues that the most probably authorial glosses in Gower manuscripts occupy a unique place within the tradition of Latin glossing of vernacular texts and that this position can best be understood when read alongside manuscripts of other popular works. Martha Driver's contribution moves beyond general concerns and examines the illustrations of Pierpont Morgan MS M.126 as intertexts for Gower's *Confessio*. Driver argues for a strong female role in the production of this particular manuscript and highlights evidence that points toward female readership of M.126. Finally, María Bullón-Fernández offers an account of Juan de Cuenca's Castilian translation of the *Confessio*. While we do not know precisely which English manuscript was the basis for Robert Payn's translation from the English and thus for Juan de Cuenca's translation from the Portuguese, we do know that it was a manuscript from the so-called first recension of the *Confessio Amantis*, the one including the dedication to Richard II and the account of Gower's alleged encounter with the King. Taking into account medieval theories of translation, this essay analyses the differences between Juan de Cuenca's translation and Gower's original poem. Juan de Cuenca often takes the ambiguity out of certain episodes and stresses the moral lesson. In this way the translator worked like some of the later, English copyists and editors of the poem, who also stressed the poem's moral side to the detriment of the ambiguous questions it raises. Focusing on specific episodes, the essay shows how Juan de Cuenca moralizes Gower and will also use this analysis as a way to explore how his moralistic changes actually help us understand the ambiguity and indeterminacy of Gower's original version.

Gower's command and easy of use of a variety of languages also enable him to negotiate a variety of discourses in his writing. As John H. Fisher argues in his groundbreaking study of Chaucer's works, Gower was not only a poet but also a moral philosopher.<sup>16</sup> Especially *Confessio Amantis* shows a marked concern with

<sup>16</sup> John Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965).

philosophical discourse. This aspect of his works is considered in the third section of the volume, which moves on to close readings of Gower's texts. J. Allan Mitchell offers a reappraisal of ethical paradigms in Gower's *Confessio*, arguing that far from being narrowly Augustinian, Gower develops a vernacular ethics of exemplarity that goes against the twentieth-century belief that medieval ethics were narrowly focused on the teachings of the Church Fathers. Georgiana Donavin builds up on this discussion by reading Gower's discussion of *rhetorique* in *Confessio* VII through the lens of Aristotelian theories as they are contained in manuscripts contemporary to Gower. Malte Urban concludes this section with a reading of Gower's use of history and older texts in his *Vox Clamantis*. This essay argues that Gower is aware of a historical rupture that separates him and his contemporaries from their originary past. The oft-noted strategy of weaving quotations of lines and whole passages from other works into his poem is a textual manifestation of Gower's awareness of the presence of fragments from the past in his present.

With regard to Gower's connection with the field of law, we do not have hard documentary evidence that would clearly link Gower with official legal institutions. Still, as Hines, Cohen and Roffey state, 'It is highly plausible that part of the younger Gower's education would have taken place in the Inns of Court of London.'<sup>17</sup> Based on references in his poetry we can further assume that he did have a detailed knowledge of legal proceedings together with an at least distant connection with the profession as a whole. The famous reference in the *Mirour de l'Omme* (c. 1375) to the poet's garment's striped sleeves (21772–74) has been taken as evidence for his legal career,<sup>18</sup> and, as we will see in the opening article by Russell Peck, the *Vox Clamantis* (early 1380s) contains a number of clues as to Gower's connection with and knowledge of the field of law.<sup>19</sup> I am convinced that Gower's firsthand experience of the legal profession not only sharpened his awareness of the shortcomings of his former colleagues (who are at the receiving end of much of his most severe criticism in his poetry), but that it also raised his awareness of the effects to which language can be put by a skilful practitioner.

Studies such as Robert Yeager's *The Search for a New Arion*, James Simpson's *Sciences and the Self*, and Larry Scanlon's *Narrative, Authority, and Power* provide

<sup>17</sup> Hines, Cohen, and Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta', p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Hines, Cohen, and Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta', p. 25. The quotation is taken from John Gower, *The French Works of John Gower*, ed. by George C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899).

<sup>19</sup> For an extended account of Gower and the law, see Fisher, *John Gower*, pp. 55–58.

useful insights into Gower's poetics and his appropriation of sources.<sup>20</sup> James Simpson's comparison of Gower's *Confessio* and Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* (1181–83) provides a very useful case study of the 'ways in which a seminal text like the *Anticlaudianus* provides an extremely revealing frame for understanding a vernacular poet who follows almost exactly two hundred years later'.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the course of his study, Simpson extends his focus beyond Gower's reception of the *Anticlaudianus*, offering deep insights into both Alain's and Gower's reception and transformation of classical texts, mostly those of Ovid. Beyond the wider cultural sources for Gower's works lies an intricate dialogue between his literary creations and the immediate sociopolitical surroundings that inform them. The two essays of the final section assess this interaction. Craig Bertolet examines the presence of Lombards in both the *Mirour de l'Omme* and *Confessio Amantis*. This essay provides a detailed account of contemporary attitudes to foreigners and Lombards in particular, and how these concerns are refracted in Gower's poetry. Finally, Eve Salisbury turns her attention to the oft-neglected figure of Gower's wife, Agnes, whom he married when he was already beginning signs of infirmity.

The essays arranged over the sections of this volume address the multidisciplinarity of Gower's works from a range of perspectives. This juxtaposition of textual criticism, translation studies, philosophical readings, and historicizing approaches serves to further our understanding of the variety of discourses that are both contained in and relevant for Gower's works. There is now an ever-increasing sense of the need for a cross-disciplinary dialogue in our approach to medieval texts and textual cultures, and this sense is echoed in this volume. Presenting a tableau of possible approaches to and ways of reading Gower's works, this volume aims to open up new interdisciplinary inroads into our wider understanding of the cultures of late medieval Europe, and England in particular, and as a poet who situates himself both within and across a multiplicity of discourses Gower is a suitable object for such a project.

<sup>20</sup> Robert F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990); James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus' and John Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, p. 21.



## Manuscripts, Material, and Translation



# JOHN GOWER: READER, EDITOR, AND GEOMETRICIAN ‘FOR ENGELONDDES SAKE’

Russell A. Peck

Alle thing that is iwist nis nat knownen by his nature propre, but by the nature of hem that  
comprehenden it.

—Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, v.6<sup>1</sup>

These olde philosophres wise,  
Of al this worldes erthe round,  
Hou large, hou thikke was the ground,  
Controoveden th’experience;  
The cercle and the circumference  
Of everything unto the hevene  
Thei setten point and mesure evene.

—Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VII.184–90

If we think of an editor as one who prepares old texts for new readers, it makes sense to think of Gower as an editor who, as he compiles his texts, would bring forth ideas from his beloved books for future readers, aware that all readers inevitably edit what they read to see what they deem to be important.<sup>2</sup> As

<sup>1</sup> Chaucer’s translation, *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 466. The *Boece* in this edition is edited by Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler.

<sup>2</sup> Given the interconnectedness of my thoughts on editing and my attempt in this essay to read Gower as editor and geometrical structuralist, I use the three-volume METS edition of the poem as my point of reference, since several points of my argument have ties with the introductions, marginal glosses, and explanatory notes to that edition. See John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway, TEAMS, Middle English Texts

Boethius puts it, a thing (in this instance, a book) is not known by its ‘nature propre’, but rather ‘by the nature of hem that comprehendit it’ (*Cons.*, v.6). People read personally, a proposition upon which the very structure of the *Confessio*, through its dialogue between Amans and Genius, depends. As readers we, like Amans, despite the admonitions of Genius, see what we are disposed to see, intuiting from the text what we desire to take. Reading is a kind of reciprocal self-construction: we read what we desire, each according to one’s will, and call it our own.

Gower is keenly aware of this circularity in the reading process and the advantages and dangers it poses; he personifies the subjectivity of the process through the reductive preoccupations of Amans. But although readers may slant meaning according to personal reflections, the effect shapes for the reader a meaningful albeit somewhat predictable integrity. Gower gets at this true-to-my-own-desire compulsion of readers in his ‘Tale of Narcissus’ (*CA*, I.2275–2358), where Narcissus attempts to negotiate his mirror image without much understanding except what he can contrive from within himself. The tale provides a highly original (i.e., edited) interpretation of the well-known Ovidian story. His (or, rather Genius’s) ‘Tale of Narcissus’ is unlike any other we are likely to know — different from what we find in Gower’s literary source, different from the psychology of self-love (narcissism) so commonly derived from Ovid’s narrative, and different from what we might expect of naturalistic mirrorings, but very much to Gower the editor’s point. As in other versions, Gower’s Narcissus is trapped in a subjective misprision. He wanders lost in his preoccupation, apart from niggling contradictions of external realities. He comes upon a well and looks in. But rather than seeing himself reflected in the water (or whatever we might imagine that ‘self to be’), he sees a beautiful woman, a presence for which he would gladly dwindle into nothingness. Gower has twisted the story to help us see what is obvious in a metaphysical way, but which we are not used to naming. What Narcissus sees as he reads the image is a woman, the object of his desire, the mistress of his imagination. So too will it be for Amans as he reflects on exempla from old books that Genius puts before him. He sees the object of his desire as he twists each example into a reflection on his own love.

Reading can be a dangerous business, especially in matters of perspective and self-construction. It is a hyperactive process that requires the reader, like Perseus,

Series, 3 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000–05). Volume I (2000; 2nd edn 2005) includes the Prologue and Books I and VIII; Volume II (2003), Books II–IV; Volume III (2004), Books V–VII.

to see from diverse angles lest some Medusa turns him to stone, or, like the monocular Acteon, he becomes victim to his desires. From the beginning of the confession in Book I, Genius attempts to focus Amans's attention on the tricks of seeing accurately and the need to guard one's eyes carefully.<sup>3</sup> The 'Tale of Narcissus', Genius argues, is an epitome of *Surquiderie* — the presumption of our perceptions. How can anyone, caught up in the ambiguities of reading intelligently, perform well? The answer is evident: the reader must develop skills in juxtaposing this with that to develop a comparative sensibility.

Consider now the second epigram at the head of my essay. 'These olde philosophres wise' (*CA*, VII.184) are craftsmen, geometricians like Ptolemy, who are skilled at exploring the irregularities of earth's surfaces by means of *Practique*, the last component of Philosophy,

whos office  
 The vertu tryeth fro the vice,  
 And techeth upon goode thewes  
 To fle the compagnie of schrewes,  
 Which stant in disposicion  
 Of mannes free eleccion.  
 Practique enformeth ek the reule,  
 Hou that a worthi king schal reule  
 His realme bothe in werre and pes.

(CA, VII.40–49)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See the Latin epigram I.iv (following I.288), on vision and hearing as the fragile gateways of the mind that Genius attempts to explain and which Gower fearfully attempts to press out through his mouth in words privy to his thoughts — 'Verba per os timide conscientia mentis agam'. As the Confessor puts it in I.304–07, he will begin by attempting 'To wite how that thin yhe hath stonde, | The which is, as I understande, | The most principal of alle, | Thurgh whom that peril mai befall'. The 'Tale of Acteon' and the 'Tale of Medusa' are found in *CA*, I.333–78 and 389–435.

<sup>4</sup> Gower's discussion of the three components of Philosophy — *Theorique*, *Rethorique*, and *Practique* (VII.30–49) — is akin to Ptolemy's sketch of the Aristotelian division of Philosophy into three, with the third, *praktiké* (with all its mathematical functions), being useful in the making of moral decisions: 'With regard to virtuous conduct in practical actions and character, this science, above all things, could make men see clearly; from the constancy, order, symmetry and calm which are associated with the divine, it makes its followers lovers of this divine beauty, accustoming them and reforming their natures, as it were, to a similar spiritual state' (*Ptolemy's Almagest*, trans. by G. J. Toomer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), I.50 (pp. 36–37)). Toomer's edition and translation are based upon Gerard of Cremona's translation of Ptolemy into Latin, the

Book VII discusses the education of a king, the proper governor of the corporate body. A good king must be a capable reader/advisor, who can distinguish shades of truth and judge accordingly. After brief observations on Theorique, Genius spends most of Book VII outlining how Aristotle, using Mathematique, gave Alexander *practical* instruction, recognizing that people need skills in calculation to govern the dangerous circularities of will. For practical analysis, tools are necessary, especially those skills considered under the four divisions of Mathematique — Arithmetique, Musique, Geometrie, Astronomique.

Mathematique of his science  
 Hath yit the thridde intelligence  
 Full of wisdom and of clergie  
 And cleped is Geometrie,  
 Thurgh which a man hath thilke sleyhte  
 Of lengthe, of brede, of depthe, of heyhte  
 To knowe the proporcion  
 Be verrai calculacion  
 Of this science: and in this wise  
 These olde philosophres wise,  
 Of al this worldes erthe round,  
 Hou large, hou thikke was the ground,  
 Controveden th'experience;<sup>5</sup>  
 The cercle and the circumference  
 Of everything unto the hevne  
 Thei setten point and mesure evene.

(VII.175–90)

translation used by Grosseteste, Albertus Magnus, Campanus of Novara, Roger Bacon, Brunetto Latini, etc. On the indiscriminate mixture of geometry, surveying, and metaphysics in the mediation of spiritual subjects see Evgeny A. Zaitsev, 'The Meaning of Early Medieval Geometry: From Euclid and Surveyors' Manuals to Christian Philosophy', *Isis*, 90 (1999), 522–53. I am grateful to Edgar Laird for these references and conversation on uses of geometry in the field of ethics in general. Gower works mainly through Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* in Book VII of *Confessio*, though he may well have had direct access to Gerard's *Almagest*.

<sup>5</sup> 'Controveden th'experience' (Discovered by observation). The phrase implies an empirical methodology, calculation by lineation and juxtaposition. Compare *CA*, IV.2454, where inventors of metals 'Controveden be sondri wise' ('Discovered by various means'), where again the action implied is experimental. See also 'controeve' in IV.926, where Amans uses practical observation of his own experience to discover whether anyone, in truth, ever finds success in love. But the point is that geometry provides an empirical basis for reading of all kinds.

This ‘thridde intelligence’, in its capacity to coordinate two points simultaneously to triangulate a conclusion, instructs the king in earth science.<sup>6</sup> Geometrie helps one to read and measure relationships, to probe the layered samplings ‘of eny worldes stacion, | Of hevene, of erthe, or eke of helle, | So as these olde bokes telle’ (VII.204–06).<sup>7</sup>

Evgeny A. Zaitsev observes, ‘Greek platonists considered the universe to be split into three levels, the higher occupied by eternal ideas, the lower consisting of changeable things of the natural world, the middle composed of mathematical — more precisely, geometrical — forms.’<sup>8</sup> This middle realm (*dianoia*: understanding) provides the means of bridging the relationship between the higher reality of ideas (*nous*: intellect) and natural things (*doxa*: opinion). In this middle area, geometrie provides a means of calculation. It works with lines, whose beginning- and end-points create space and the possibilities of measuring binary oppositions by means of a third point. Given the juxtaposition of text, idea, and reader that Gower presents, the practice of reading metaphorically engages both linear and spatial measurement. It is a practice grounded in an empirical methodology as the reader weighs, measures, and numbers evidences in the text to determine what is true and how it is true.<sup>9</sup> That Geometrie is ‘full of wisdom

<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that in Martianus Capella’s *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, Geometry is presented as the first in the quadrivium to present her gifts (prior even to Arithmetic, who is usually first); she is described as so high an intelligence that ‘we must conclude that she is the offspring of Daedalus, of Labyrinth fame’ (*Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, trans. by William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson with E. L. Burge, 2 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971–77), II, 218). After dazzling the court with her beauty she proceeds to describe the whole geography of earth: ‘There is no portion of the earth’s surface that I could not describe from memory’ (p. 220). The same may be said of the surfaces of any metaphysical component on earth as well. As Geometry locates and identifies those surfaces, she creates geography.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed analysis than I am able to provide here of uses of geometry as an analytic tool within medieval culture, from land measurement and navigation to psychology, logic, and theology, see my ‘Number as Cosmic Language’, in *Essays in the Numerical Criticism of Medieval Literature*, ed. by Caroline D. Eckhardt (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), pp. 15–64.

<sup>8</sup> Zaitsev, ‘Meaning of Early Medieval Geometry’, p. 522.

<sup>9</sup> The critical model of knowing by measuring, numbering, and weighing data is founded in the principles of Creation cited in the Book of Wisdom, 11.21: ‘Omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti.’ A good literary example of this empirical reading practice may be seen in the protagonist of Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, who, after reading the story of Seys and Alcione, ‘overlooked hyt everydel’ to ponder the relativity of its truth — ‘Me thoghte wonder yf hit were so’

and of clergie' (VII.177), as Genius reports from 'Aristotle',<sup>10</sup> elevates it as a prestigious form of analysis. In practice of the new empirical science,<sup>11</sup> Geometrie assists discovery by inductive observation as it 'Controoveden th'experience' (VII.187).<sup>12</sup> Geometrie provides a practical syntax for grappling with chaos and uncertainty. For purposes of criticism (i.e., intelligent reading of data), Geometrie equips the reader with a subtle methodology that Gower calls 'sleyhte' (VII.179), a tremendously useful term in that its implications reach in so many metaphoric directions — even into the metaphor of self.

*Sleyhte* can be glossed to mean 'expertise' or 'skill in calculation'. But such glosses may be too cautious. The term bears connotations of 'ingenuity', 'imagination', and 'illusion', as well, and, given its multiplicity of sense, it can mean 'sleight of hand', or even 'trickery'. Fiction, like suppositional logic, might be a superior way of getting at the possibilities of truth, if one comes armed with *sleyhte*.<sup>13</sup> Geometrie's skills enable people to manipulate evidence inventively for new, observable effects and may be used according to the desire of a skilful reader to perceive what may be there as well as what is desired. Geometrie pro-

(ll. 231–33) — and then proceeds 'in my game' (l. 238) to experiment with what he has discovered. In Gower, this reading game is the very basis of the empirical epistemologies that constitute the open-ended plot of the *Confessio* that takes the reader from the narcissistic Amans lost in the wood at the outset to the image of John Gower and his mirror in Book VIII, as the reader puts willfulness aside to contemplate the welfare and spiritual geography of England.

<sup>10</sup> Gower's actual source for the passage is Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, I.3.7.

<sup>11</sup> Empiricism is 'this newe science that men lere', mentioned by Chaucer in *Parliament of Fowls*, line 25. One might argue that one reason we get such sophisticated literature in England at the end of the fourteenth century is because of the fascination with empirical thought and the beginnings of experimental science that shapes sophisticated reading of all kinds, with text as data.

<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that the quadrivial arts of Mathematics are all given praiseworthy epithets — the first, Arsmetique is a 'matiere' from which a man 'mai liere' (VII.153–54); the second in Gower's scheme, Musique, is 'a science' (VII.164) that teaches harmony and 'notes of acordement' (VII.168); and the fourth, Astronomie, is a 'hyh science' (VII.192), reaching from the moon to the stars. But Geometrie, 'the thridde intelligence', is singled out for its 'wisdom' and 'clergie' (VII.176–77), three being, through its triangulation, the first real number, the number of manifestation.

<sup>13</sup> I am thinking here of Boccaccio's defence of the sleights of poetry as a useful art whereby fiction may lead the reader into the presence of truth even as philosophy can do (*Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, especially XIV.6.9–10 and 12–13, along with Book XV and its defence of the ancient writers, in an argument that he addresses to the king himself in XIV.21). See also St Anselm's defence of the oblique language of riddles as a means of expressing and seeing one thing through another (*Monologion*, chap. 65).

vides hypothetical positions that enable the mind to construct virtual realities by lineation 'of lengthe, of brede, of depthe, of heytte' (VII.180). Given its capacity to measure space and volume, outsides and interiors that we may not be able to see literally, it is a skill that works well to survey 'be verrai calculacioun' (VII.181–82) the metaphysical 'porporcion' of things, as well as the physical. It articulates a basis for critical understanding of 'texts' and functions to help make reading and purposeful editing of evidence possible.

Geometrie enables 'these olde philosophres wise' (VII.184) to read with the mind's eye 'this worldes erthe round' and 'everything unto hevene', whereby they can 'setten point and mesure evene' (VII.185–90). In this respect it has a crucial function in logic and syllogistic reasoning. To 'setten point' is the first step in any logical process: no analysis can begin until the 'points' of the argument (i.e., the major and minor premises) are determined. 'Point' provides a fixity amidst the flux of the natural world that makes reasoning and the calculation within relativities possible.

Understanding, for every reader, is self-generated. But the logic of geometry, with all its 'sleyhtes' (VII.179), helps the reader to objectify experience and perceive ways in which the phenomenology of reading invents itself. Gower's intricate voicing of Genius, Amans, and the *doxa* of their circumstances, along with the hundreds of exempla from old texts recast in new shapes according to new situations and placements, challenge the reader to 'controeve' these triangulations within the liminal well of personal perception. A good reader of Gower has little choice but to become a strong reader,<sup>14</sup> skilled in drawing analogies and imaginative investigation of both verbal and syntactic metaphor. Discovery of that reading strength is the goal of the whole exercise of dialectic in the poem to access the personal and political subtexts toward which Gower would have us read.

Gower edits ancient texts with a pedagogical purpose. He writes to reform his audience. His text can initiate stimulators that provoke somewhat predictable responses within the cultural field where readers and writers coexist. His writing perpetually edits ideas within the volatile continuum of human experience as he attempts to map and thereby stabilize that volatility for helpful ends. Gower reads and writes for pleasure, to be sure, but his reading and writing process is ethically goal-oriented. He writes 'for Engelondes sake', he announces at the outset of his poem — for England's welfare and its common good. What have Amans and Genius to do with England, we might ask? The term *sake* appears dozens of times in his poem as he writes for 'loves sake' or for 'Christes sake' or for 'his sake', 'thi

<sup>14</sup> I'm borrowing the term from Harold Bloom. See n. 36, below.

sake', or 'mi sake'. *Sake* is a specialized term for Gower, implying benefit, aim, purpose, right jurisdiction. *Sake* is the point shaped by conjoined causes and conclusions that focus the poem's geography. But how is our sake akin to England's sake? By what triangulations can we conjoin those two sakes to avoid being forsaken?

*Confessio Amantis* is essentially an exercise in the phenomenology of reading as cultural therapy — a book written for our (the readers') sake. Gower starts with reading as an emotive, individual act, largely figured in the subjectivities of Amans's desire. But he concludes with an entirely different sense of reading as a collaborative act, where voices of the past, present, and future intermingle to construct a new sense of self, a self participated in through otherness. Reading bridges the gaps.

### *Setting the Point: Gower as Reader/Editor*

E. Talbot Donaldson suggests that a good editor must be a careful reader who looks deeply into the text to perceive identifiable subcurrents, thereby opening possibilities of interpretation for other readers.<sup>15</sup> The converse is likewise true: a good reader must be a careful editor. Gower is just such a reader/editor as he approaches hidden texts and subtexts through hundreds of exempla. He would reinvent subjectively to generate new cognitions through which his audience might perceive his grand project — a book fit for kings and nations of people, imagined or real, psychological or political.<sup>16</sup> His first extended exemplum is

<sup>15</sup> See Donaldson's defence of editing practices based on 'sense and learning', the 'chief resources' of a scholar, rather than some mechanical notion of editing ('Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, D117: A Critical Edition', *Speculum*, 40 (1965), 626–33; especially p. 633). For discussion of the subjectivity of editing, see Donaldson's chapter 'The Psychology of Editors of Middle English Texts', in *Speaking of Chaucer* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 102–18, especially pp. 106–09 on subjectivity and intelligence. On the editor as one who looks 'in the deeper sense of what 'he considers right', see p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> In the first recension of the poem (1390) Gower says he writes 'A book for King Richardes sake | To whom bilongeth my ligeance' (Prol.\*24–25); in the Lancastrian recension Gower edits his own work and now writes 'A bok for Engelondes sake, | The yer sextenthe of Kyng Richard' (Prol.24–25). The subtext in both instances is the constituency of 'good rule', which is the conceptual text that Gower would at that moment be editing. The idea of kingship and *polis* applies, of course, both as a personal/psychological concept, as well as a socio/political one, as Gower, in the latter part of the poem, develops his idea that everyone has a personal kingdom 'to justefie'. See *CA*, viii.2109–21.

the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the monster of time (Prol.585–917), a text reinscribed as a prefix to good rule. Gower expands the biblical passage of twenty-seven verses (Daniel 2. 19–45) to over three hundred lines. Against this exemplum, Gower subsequently projects the heart and soul of his poem through Genius and Amans's dialogue.

Several *Confessio* manuscripts include two miniatures, one of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, showing the King asleep with the giant towering over him prior to its destruction; the other the figure of Amans kneeling at the foot of Genius, his confessor.<sup>17</sup> These images establish ('setten', the geometrician might say) the poem's two focal points — one political, the other personal. The first picture, that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the monster of time, looks outward even to the end of time, as a boulder whirls toward the monster from behind, like the last judgement of God's will. The boulder, hurled from a dimension beyond the monster's ken, offers a potent commentary on contradictory dualities of history as Gower extends Daniel's prophecy to juxtapose biblical ideas with the divisive degeneracy of contemporary behaviour that is consequent on the inability of the world's political leaders to achieve just rule. The second image, that of Amans at confession, looks inward toward the personal impulses of the will that we commonly take to constitute the private self expressing itself. These two images point to the public and private visions that are ultimately triangulated to form the poem's transcendent conclusion — 'for Engelondes sake'.<sup>18</sup>

As editor of ancient texts Gower is perpetually concerned with time problems, as Nebuchadnezzar's dream of history makes evident. The crisis pertains to the present, not the past or future. Although his goal as editor is largely pedagogical — for our sake and his own, he recognizes, especially in his conclusion, that amusement does not equate with insight. Even from the outset we know that Genius will ultimately fail in his attempts to instruct Amans. They are only *figura*, invented to help understand a bit of the boulder's trajectory. The hundreds of literary exempla, presented ostensibly for the instructional therapy of Amans,

<sup>17</sup> See Jeremy Griffiths, 'Confessio Amantis: The Poem and its Pictures', in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 163–78. The two images aptly locate the political/temporal and personal/didactic components of the poem that Gower is perpetually triangulating as he sets his points to measure and delineate the depth and breadth of the poem's ethics in the public and private spheres.

<sup>18</sup> I find it useful to think of this transcendence in terms of Bonaventure's *The Mind's Journey to God*, with all its triangulations of outside, inside, above patterns, a structural progression that works efficiently in much of fourteenth-century English literature, especially in Gower, Chaucer, and Langland.

evoke a vast 'library' (virtually all the books Gower has been able to get his hands on or has heard of, it would seem). There is a distinctly 'edited' quality about these exempla in their differences (sometimes radical) from their sources. The conclusion of the Prologue may juxtapose the happy story of Arion's carrying of the children to safety through the powerful music of his harp with the entropic vision of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of time, but that happy ending is more a matter of his reader's intentions than the 'sleyhte' of the poet's craft. He can provide geometrics of a happy island, but there are no guarantees that the reader will or can ever get there.

Gower's simultaneous evocation of and deviation from his sources signify an originality that is deliberately 'occasional', apt to the concurrent need he feels for Arion-like inspiration to resurrect an obdurate past. His text is 'new' even though calculated to be traditional, secure in the bindings of its dark origins. The 'occasion' that matters to him is recovery of meaning amidst the *doxa* of the natural world that he would recuperate in ways comprehensible to the reader, who needs to know something of origins to be able to think through how and where we dwell in the present time. These old books, Gower implies, provide a geography of time that functions as skeleton key to our collaborative, communal being. Recovery of a coherent sense of the present is a metaphysical subtext of the poem. Gower is perpetually editing, not just to show that we all come from old books, but that the ideas of those books dwell perpetually within us.<sup>19</sup>

In *Confessio*, books and the reading of books are presented through the reciprocities of confessional dialogue, where the technologies of voicing and self-reconstruction constitute the essence of Gower's bookish enterprise. But his is not the usual Christian confessional repertory. Rather, Gower writes as if he were the first humanist in English, his humanism anchored firmly in the learning and pedagogy of the ancients.<sup>20</sup> His Prologue, like an eighteenth-century preface,

<sup>19</sup> This notion of reading old texts to recover, at least momentarily, a perpetual, albeit transitive, present is essentially Augustinian. See the citation of Augustine's *Confessions* in *Confessio Amantis*, I, 3, where Augustine talks about the experience of reading a psalm: anticipation tugs at memory and the reader becomes 'engaged in the present transit from what was coming to what is past. As this activity works itself out, anticipation dwindles as memory expands, until anticipation is canceled and the whole transaction is lodged in memory' (*Confessions*, xi.28.38). In that present moment time seems to have been transcended: the reader and the psalm become one. Gower seems to hope for a comparable epiphany, where past insights hidden in old examples burgeon to flourish momentarily in the present.

<sup>20</sup> In his love of books, Gower is like his English predecessor, the proto-humanist Richard de Bury, student of the Latin classics but also Aegidius Romanus's *De regimine principum* (a main

serves as a thematic introduction and establishes a methodology and philosophical substructure for the whole poem. His scholarly argument is measured by Latin epigrams that identify the topics of each subsection. Beyond this, he triangulates his narrative with Latin marginalia to help the reader locate, access, and draw conclusions about materials.

Consider, for example, this Latin marginal gloss from the first recension of *Confessio* that makes editorial comment on how his book has been made, as if to help readers get their minds around his massive poem. He explains how he ‘has most zealously compiled the present little book from various chronicles, histories, and sayings of poets and philosophers, like a honeycomb gathered from various flowers, to the extent that his infirmity allowed him’.<sup>21</sup> His gloss reads like a footnote, citing sources and methods of compilation. Gower at this moment is looking on his book as an anthology that will please its readers as if they were feasting on honey. Although the honeycomb trope is ancient, Gower means quite literally that his poem is designed to provide sustenance — wisdom as well as pleasure. By listing kinds of materials he has worked from he provides a key to his pedagogical enterprise. Gower gives us a book that is not only to be read, but that is to be used like a health food to nurture the mind and body toward a state of well-being.

Gower’s humanist position, secured through bookish exempla, is akin to that of Higden’s *Polychronicon*, where, in discussing Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, VIII.10, he speculates on ‘philosophris that traveliden theire wittes for to finde and to knowe cause of thinges and maner of lyvyng’<sup>22</sup> by looking to changeable

source for Gower’s political ethics). Richard de Bury was companion to Edward III, then tutor to the Black Prince, then Bishop of Durham; his *Philobiblon* demonstrated the value of law and moral virtue as perceived by earlier generations in their books. Like Richard de Bury, Gower prides himself on linguistic skills and admires and imitates the complexity of voicing in diverse languages. He appreciates grammatical cruces and intricacies of language *per se*. He experiments with language in bookish ways (e.g., the ‘noght/That/ne’ constructions akin to Old French ‘pres (que) ne / por poi (que) ne’ formations—see *Confessio*, I (2006), 264, n. to CA, 1.786–88). Gower’s classically oriented sensibility, more akin to that of Petrarch and Ben Jonson than Boccaccio, Chaucer, or Shakespeare (though Shakespeare admired him almost as much as he did Chaucer), sets his humanism apart from his contemporaries.

<sup>21</sup> ‘[...] set tanquam fauum ex variis floribus recollectum, presentem libellum ex variis cronicis, historiis, poetarum philosophorumque dictis, quatenus sibi infirmitas permisit, studiosissime compliauit’ (Galloway’s translation). See *Confessio*, I (2006), 287. The Latin marginal gloss appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 294, and is inserted between lines 34–35.

<sup>22</sup> Chaucer shares this position admirably in the comic frustration of his narrator/dreamer of *Hous of Fame* who tries to figure out the cause of things, ‘what causeth swene[n]e [...] why this [...]’

evidences that they will know by ‘shappe of lengthe and brede, other in meyng, as in song’, but which are only likenesses, not God; for ‘philosophres and dyvynes knownen welle, that no thing that is chaungeable may be but by him that is alle weye by *oon* and noughe chaungeable’.<sup>23</sup> For Gower the *cause* of changeability lies in man, who is ‘cause of that schall falle’ (Prol.528), ‘His oghne cause of wel and wo’ (Prol.547), etc.<sup>24</sup> Like Higden, Gower approaches the problem of instability as a mathematician might do, with God as number base of the universe, the only ‘oon’ from which stability may ensue.<sup>25</sup> He is a man of faith, but his cause is not evangelical. Rather, he counts on the God-given laws of England to provide the stability that will enable people to live together in peace.

Gower’s trust in law is admirably manifest in the ‘Tale of Lycurgius’ where the just king establishes good law under God that ‘mihte afterward forevere laste’ (VII.2945). He gets the people of Athens to take ‘an othe’ that ‘ech of you schall undertake | My lawes for to keep and holde’ (VII.2990–91), knowing that, despite his absence, ‘evere, whyl the world schal duelle, | Athenis schal the betre fare’ (VII.2980–81). He then ‘schop him nevere to be founde’ (VII.3003), so that ‘goode lawe’, ‘which was for comun profit set’ (3007), should never cease. Under right rule, the law makes orderly living possible even amidst the chaos of the desert.

Hope lies in just law and good kingship. The upper echelons of the Church have, for the most part, failed, given the absurdities of the papacy and the distractions of Wycliffites. But even those corruptions do not matter so much, as long as there is good rule under an attentive king, guided by sound principles of law — divine law, natural law, and *lex positiva* — found in books and the hearts

why that [...]. But why the cause is, noght wot I’ (*House of Fame*, ll. 2–52). He knows, like Higden’s ‘philosophris’, that without a sense of *cause* (the middle term of every syllogism), nothing may be done or concluded.

<sup>23</sup> Emphasis mine. See *The English Polychronicon*, ed. by Richard A. Seeger, 2 vols (Ann Arbor: UMI Books on Demand, 1974), I.12.60–101 (I, 272–73). For another passage well known to Gower on the oneness of God, the source of all things, including time, but in whom there is neither movement nor time, see Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure* (*Li Livres dou Tresor*), trans. by Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland, 1993), I.6–10 (pp. 6–8).

<sup>24</sup> See also ‘Bot al this wo is cause of man’ (Prol.906), ‘The man is cause of alle wo’ (Prol.965). In his account of the disintegration of the world foreseen in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, sin is ‘modor of divisoun’ (Prol.1030), and man is the cause of such divisiveness and the loss of ‘the governance of lawe’ (Prol.795–880).

<sup>25</sup> Gower uses dozens of phrases like ‘high God’, ‘high almighty’, ‘high king of kings’, ‘high magesty’, ‘high creator’, to define the starting point that could stabilize temporal matters and from which all details of creation radiate.

of the people. He is indeed concerned with the salvation of the soul, but he locates the means of ordering the soul in ancient writings, books on governance that *include* Scripture and law. The soul may be eternal, but it is compiled, like a book, insofar as its selfhood is made manifest. Its temporal being is perceived through a geography of rhetoric. But those numbers hold true and may be understood only through the One on which to ‘setten point’.

### *What and How We Read: The Discovery of Domain*

Gower sees his very psyche and the psyche of his culture bound up with books. The *Confessio* is, among other things, a gigantic collection of stories drawn out of old books that pose disturbing questions and initiate thought. Genius may project answers to thought problems, but they are always relative to contexts and situations and are more provocative than definitive. The debate between Genius the pedagogue and Amans the acolyte shows how this open-endedness works.<sup>26</sup> Gower’s genius, like his admonishing priest, may supply the wisdom-hungry reader with cultural resources, both ancient and modern, but it cannot do the learning. Only his reader’s genius can do that. There are no guarantees that the reader will see what Gower as writer intended. The reader, like Amans, will always be biased by personal preoccupations, but this bias greatly empowers him. The ethical effects of the written word can only be realized through the reader.

Gower, as a sophisticated reader/writer/editor and literary guardian, knows he cannot control the mind of his reader any more than Genius can control the responses of Amans. The reader is the focus of all literary endeavour. Like Amans, Gower’s audience reads for unpredictable reasons — for instruction, to be sure, but also for diversion, inspiration, entertainment, information, political subversion, enlightenment, self-improvement, self-affirmation, exposé, or whatever. Gower implies in the marginal gloss cited earlier that most of the time he, and others like him, read for meaning — *sentence* — the honey gathered from the many flowers of his anthology. He also suggests that reading, being personal, is largely a matter of taste. Indeed, taste and readership go together.

<sup>26</sup> Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) gets nicely at the open-ended quality of Gower’s judgements as she plays in her title upon Chaucer’s compliment to ‘moral Gower’ at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*. For Chaucer, Langland, and Gower ‘moral’ is a discursive concept; we are the ones with a pigeon-hole grasp of it.

Tzvetan Todorov talks about ‘understanding a reader’.<sup>27</sup> A reader, he suggests, might be approached by examining the society and social environment within which he dwells; conversely, a reader might be examined from the inside out as a ‘character’ or ‘narratee’ who supplies a voice to what he or she reads. A third option, one especially promising for dealing with readership and taste in Gower, Todorov calls ‘the domain of the logic of reading’.<sup>28</sup> As interpreters, we examine the logic of reader/text relationships: ‘How’, Todorov asks, ‘does a text get us to construct an imaginary world? Which aspects of text determine the construction we produce as we read? And in what way?’<sup>29</sup> He suggests that social interaction is the only way to eliminate differences between direct and narrated discourse and the worlds they evoke. In dialogue, ‘Words are identical to words, and conversation is direct and immediate.’<sup>30</sup> But although the theatrics of direct quotation staged through the drama of social interaction may guarantee an authority contingent upon the character speaking (where indirect discourse references attention only through narratological intervention), the effect of Gower’s direct discourse, given the theatrical casting of his ideas through Genius, Amans, and the propelling exempla, is to enliven multiple possibilities of reading and heighten our engagement as readers. Elizabeth Allen is quite right to point out that ‘direct discourse [in Gower] serves to *stage* moral questions rather than shore up moral authority’.<sup>31</sup>

In his exempla, Gower gives us ‘readers’ aplenty who speak in their ‘own’ voices, and he encourages us to interrogate their motives and integrity. Mainly, however, the moral issues of the poem are voiced through direct dialogue between Genius and Amans. Both protagonists are readers and editors, but they read and edit in different ways. Genius is a reader of texts, a pedagogue who tries to bring stories to bear upon Amans’s circumstance. Amans, on the other hand, is a reader who tries foremost to read his own desires. He applies Genius’s ‘texts’ spasmodically to himself within a domain of logic that may not be readily assessed. As we approach the poem, we are obliged to look beneath their discourse at the shaky

<sup>27</sup> See Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. by Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 67–82.

<sup>28</sup> Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, p. 70.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 54 (emphasis mine).

domain of personalized logic, where Genius and Amans read exempla, each other, and their imagined worlds through well-oiled predilections.

Gower is crafty in laying out the logic of this domain and gives us ample clues, especially in the Prologue, for navigation. In staging the voicing Gower is careful to define the poem's mental space as a post-Edenic wilderness. Fundamentally, *Confessio* studies problems of disorder — the chaotic, desire-laden bifurcations that fragment the individual psyche and corrupt social behaviour. In the Prologue, Gower defines this breakdown of rational order as sin, 'modor of divisioun' (1030). Since the Fall, he argues, people live in a condition of fractious disassociation:

Division, the Gospell seith,  
On hous upon another leith,  
Til that the regne al overthrowe.  
And thus may every man wel knowe,  
Division aboven alle  
Is thing which makth the world to falle,  
And evere hath do sith it began.

(Prol.967–73)

This entropic propensity toward disintegration — 'one house against another' (l. 968; cf. Luke 11. 17) — is, after the Fall, a perpetual feature of man's natural condition, whether physical or psychological: 'for his complexioun | Is mad upon divisioun | Of cold, of hot, of moist, of drye' (Prol.975–76). The 'contraire of his astat | Stant evermor in such debat', and, 'til that o part be overcome' (Prol.978–82), none will find any peace but death. Gower commits his voice, in this poem, at least, to discovering a logic that *can* read such chaos amidst temporal uncertainties.

These dire contrarieties within humankind's temporized situation cannot be taken lightly, for they inevitably affect the way we see and the way we read. The 'debat' is continuous, with little hope of a satisfactory resolution. The Prologue lays out the subtext of disintegration efficiently, with the biblical exemplar of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Monster of Time as focal point (Prol.585–1052). The terrain where mankind wanders is illusory and unstable: it may have fine courtly moments and verbal wit, as in the comic repartée between Amans and Genius, but basically, throughout the poem, the moral ethos remains chaotic, a desert of relativities, where time, like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, becomes degenerate, an amalgam of clay and iron that crumbles before the onrushing boulder of God's will. This terrain, perpetually reducing itself to nothingness, is familiar, of course, to readers who know the *Vox Clamantis*, with its detailed accounts of ethical and social wildernesses from which we hear fragmented voices crying, but

find little hope beyond the poet's vatic admonitions for social reform which experience knows almost always fall on deaf ears; or, earlier, his *Mirour de l'Omme*, with its account of the Fall and the prolific progeny of Sin and Death's children who so profusely populate subsequent human existence.

But as Gower moves the reader into congenial dialogue between Genius and Amans, the darkling threats of the Prologue recede to a hidden subtext, as Gower brings us into the harmonies of Arion and poetry<sup>32</sup> and provides a host of analytic voices that reassuringly attempt to remedy such disintegrations — the voices of Genius, ancient authority, the Bible, right reason, Aristotelian mediation, common sense, recollected manifestations of law, the voice of the people, divine 'pourveance', proverbial lore — voices accompanied by non-diegetic Latin marginalia. These voices speak to the reader through exempla and analogies, as if restructuring society and the psyche within the purview of an implicitly moral geography. But although the presentation may be formally reassuring, in that the geometry of placement helps to map configurations of a problem, thereby making it less intimidating, the results always remain tentative relative to the capacities of the reader. That is, even though the method of analysis and the poet's composition describing it may be instructive, or even coercive, it cannot determine the slippery response of the beholder.<sup>33</sup>

### *Editing Ethics: Reading Culture, Reading Self*

Throughout the *Confessio*, Gower reads and writes like a surveyor who explores ethical bifurcations and discontinuities through pointed relationships — strata, proportions, ratios, resemblances, and measure — all with a refined sense of an Aristotelian mean, a methodology that applies to all forms of the 'domain of the logic of reading', whether it be old books, one's love life, or the inner workings of law and political governance. In the opening lines of *Confessio*, Gower explains

<sup>32</sup> See R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1990) for an assessment of poetry as a redemptive counterbalance to sin's disruptive effects in Gower's *Confessio*. Gower places the story of Arion at the end of the Prologue (1053–88), as if to answer the corrosive degeneration of time in Nebuchadnezzar's dream with the constructive measures of time by the poet.

<sup>33</sup> Understanding can only come from within the reader and there is no certain way to control the result. As J. Allan Mitchell insists, 'in the strongest sense [Gower's] poem remains to be *invented* through reader response' (*Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 52).

the kind of text he is preparing and touches on theoretical components of reading itself. The processes of reading underlie the ideological basis of his poem and its field of meaning. If optimism is to be found in the poem, it is bound up in the merits of reading. The post-Edenic setting may be bleak, but, once into Book I, the illusion of activity, whether of reason and interrogation or of willfulness and desire, draws a smile of possibilities on the unpredictable face of the desert. Genius immediately gets busy and, following the poet's lead, puts time to work. The chaos of possibilities lends itself well to the pleasure of reading — there is so much to be read, edited, and brought forth!

Gower introduces his therapeutic rationale by triangulating three temporal zones — the past, the present, and the future:

Of hem that writen ous tofore  
 The bokes duelle, and we therfore  
 Ben tawht of that was write tho:  
 Forthi good is that we also  
 In oure tyme among ous hierie  
 Do wryte of newe som matiere,  
 Essampled of these olde wyse,  
 So that it myhte in such a wyse,  
 Whan we ben dede and elleswhere,  
 Believe to the worldes eere  
 In tyme comende after this.

(Prol.1–11)

Gower's primary concern, it seems, is with the present, 'oure tyme among ous hierie' (Prol.5), a fallen world he attempts to reorder by reading books of former times that 'duelle' (Prol.2) among us.<sup>34</sup> *Duelle* is a word particularly suited to discussion of humankind's efforts to endure on the margins of chaos. The fallen world in which the fleeting present is so precarious is a place where people more commonly 'dwell/wander' than live well with certitude.

When we activate ourselves to 'dwell' transiently *amidst* 'bokes', we, as readers who would 'ben tawht' (Prol.3), enter into a binary relationship with an unstable past. Old books not only give voice to and thus provide information about people

<sup>34</sup> The *MED* gives 'remain' as the meaning for 'duelle' in this line (i.e., books of former times remain available to us, especially now that Gower has re-presented them). Gower uses the verb *duellen* dozens of times in his poem with a rich array of meanings. The verb animates the instability of its subject through implications like 'living amidst temporalities' and 'wandering' (see *MED* and *OED* on medieval usage of the word), and it is worth considering such implications in line 2 as well.

in days gone by (what concerned them and how they thought about themselves and society), they inform us of human behaviour in general. To be 'tawht', the reader must enter into his/her personal understanding to straddle a book's field of meaning, a point that Amans will dramatize repeatedly, oftentimes quite amusingly. As surveyor of time, Gower posits that if we are to comprehend the present we need to comprehend the past; but to comprehend the past, we must study ourselves as readers — readers of ancient texts, to be sure, but also triangulators of self and modern society, for reading is, by definition, a social practice to 'controeden' (VII.187) by empirical observation authors, scribes, and readers from times past juxtaposed with readers and writers now, whether as selves or imagined cultures. This straddling of then-and-now by means of reading practices has a re-creative function that defines the very ideology of *Confessio*.

Gower reads with a sharp awareness that meaning inevitably changes from one era to another. His text requires of its reader an imaginative engagement that provokes the reader's own construction of what constitutes authority. Allen puts the matter well: 'Gower's *Confessio*, a compilation of frankly exemplary tales, increasingly calls for reading methods that extend well beyond acceptance of authorial directives — instead demanding readerly initiative and imagination.'<sup>35</sup>

In the Prologue, Gower reads, he says, so that he can write 'newe som matiere, | Essampled of these olde wise' (Prol.6–7). As I suggested at the outset, Gower reads — and would have us read — like an editor. He is not concerned with re-creating ancient texts as such, or even with the recovery of archaic meanings. His goal is to present a reader's text compiled according to the specific goals of his own agenda.<sup>36</sup> Reading is inevitably an unstable practice, but that may be why it is so useful to folk in their mutual but individually perceived desert spaces. Gower

<sup>35</sup> Allen, *False Fables*, chap. 3, 'The Costs of Exemplary History', p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> The idea I'm interested in here is that strong readers re-create on their own terms what they read. I am not concerned with Bloom's notions of the writer as someone anxious about being 'original' amidst contested proprieties of claiming ideas as one's own. But Bloom's notion of a 'strong reader' as an individual even Oedipal or Narcissistic reader, as well as a communal, social-minded one, corresponds in useful ways with Gower's thinking on the interstices between past, present, and future, and the personal and public. With Gower the idea of readers misreading texts is an inevitability rather than an egocentric effort 'to clear imaginative space for themselves' (*The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 5). Bloom develops further the idea of readers and writers distorting texts for personal ends in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), where he argues that there are no texts but rather relationships between texts (p. 3, *passim*), again an idea that seems quite Gowerian to me. For a more recent summary of concepts of a 'strong reader', see Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000).

knows that what he writes will 'dwell' in the minds of others only as long as there is an audience for his work. One purpose of binary relationships (himself and the past with its 'olde wise') hinges upon another (his present work and an indeterminable audience 'in tyme comende after this' — Prol.11) 'whan we ben dede and elleswhere' (Prol.9). In this juxtaposition of double binaries (past, present; present, future), the present — the most unstable component of the paradigm — is the constant, or, given the operational chaos of present-day behaviour, the unconstant constant. The present provides a mean between past and future, a staging area that interlocks the double paradigm despite the uncertainties it bundles together.

As reader/editor of past works, Gower sees his editorial function as that of mediator. He announces that he

wolde go the middel weie  
 And wryte a bok *between* the tweie,  
 Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore,  
 That of the lasse or of the more  
 Som man *mai lyke* of that I wryte.  
 (Prol.17–21, emphasis mine)

The geometric of his task places him as a straddler between us as audience and old books. He mediates old readings and the perpetually new 'lyke's of new audiences (Prol.21). This juxtaposing of lust and lore, of desire and wisdom, inevitably raises problems of voicing. As author/mediator, Gower must not only study *what* his audience 'mai lyke', but *why* they might like it, and, most difficult of all, *how* he should voice ideas for best rhetorical effect. His practice is to adopt a dramatic structure with personae who speak. He takes care to find the right medium, the familiar vernacular language of his audience through which they might be disposed to respond. That is, for Gower any discussion of 'self' involves communality, fragments of being that are dramatized to reverberate in conjunction with each other, which is why his dramatic staging works so well: aspects of Amans come to life variously as he responds theatrically to different facets of the social issues among which he dwells.<sup>37</sup>

Gower recognizes that this move toward a strategic drama of interrogation, exemplification, and confessional response, sets him even further apart from the

<sup>37</sup> See *Confessio*, II, 10–17, particularly the discussions of Gower's staging of events, mindful of visual components of theatrical performance as the eye and ear juxtapose unspoken as well as spoken features of the dialogue.

wise philosophers in his library. Their voices have been recast by Genius in a stratagem of self-enactment among and amidst a communality of transtemporal readership — Gower, his audience ('Chaucer', the 'king', and us), Genius, and Amans, along with a semiconscious cast performing within the exempla. The search for common ground is collaborative; the goal (i.e., the effect) is to discover mutual concerns that might dwell together productively, albeit only momentarily. The ideological populace of this collaboration substantiates a geography of readerly domain, a new ground upon which features of old books are reconstituted.<sup>38</sup>

Having shifted the matière of old books to new ground, Gower converts the politic subject from books to that of the state itself, as we have seen — 'A bok for Engelondes sake' (Prol.24), rather than 'King Richardes sake' (Prol.\*24). Where first he chose to shape his focus through the living figure of the present king, in his revision, he now focuses on national stability to celebrate the land itself. This revision carries over into his rewriting of the poem's conclusion, with its prayer for England.<sup>39</sup> In his revision, it is as if Todorov's 'domain of the logic of reading' interfaces with 'reading the logic of domain' — that common ground of the common voice of people for their common profit, a communality that can exist only when *read into* the otherwise chaotic desert, where it exists only as an illusion shared by some.

Gower's identification with the land and a commonality of voice, albeit deeply hidden within its unstable people, I find to be quite ennobling, and is perhaps his greatest innovation beyond his sources as he localizes the self and extends it simultaneously to its coastal margins. This new geography of a political self mirrors Gower at his most coercive, as he inscribes a utopic order where, in fact,

<sup>38</sup> The impersonated dialogue between Amans and Genius enables Gower to develop propositions about the limitations of instruction through analogy. On his appreciation of the perplexing unpersuasiveness of instruction by analogy, see William Robins, 'Romance, Exemplum, and the Subject of the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 19 (1997), 157–81, especially pp. 172–73, on Genius's giving up on Amans ('For I can do to thee nomore | Bot teche thee the rihte weie' (VIII.2146–47). 'Amans's sense of himself as a lover', Robins argues, 'is belied. The logic of evaluating his life according to external goods breaks down under its own weight: such an external way of thinking is a "thing where thou miht non ende winne" (VIII.2430), making Amans out to be, in Aristotle's phrase, a chameleon and weakly supported' (p. 173).

<sup>39</sup> The shift is more subtle than is sometimes allowed. The point is less a switch in loyalties away from King Richard to Henry of Lancaster than it is a shift to a larger concern, which Gower sees to be the state itself, rather than its specific temporal rulers. Gower views England as a sacred manifestation of God's beneficence — our Eden, if we could just get our heads together. As Gower honours the land that nurtured him, the tone of such passages has a Virgilian ring rather than the more usual Ovidian one of Amans's more myopic concerns.

oppositions are, in the latter fourteenth century, in hot contest among politicos, church authorities, Lollards, powerful and not-so-powerful merchants, peasants, and writers of many stripes. But beneath the clamour of merciless parliaments, baronial and ecclesiastical greed, and an outraged commons, he would recover a collective subjectivity and a potent truth; that truth (his conclusion) is the discovery of his long-sought-after text — England — an epiphany, indeed. She may be poor and oft ravaged, attempting to communicate through an unstable language, but she is there and well shored, *if one reads rightly*.

### *Making an End in the Desert*

To make a good ending we need a keen sense of setting and knowledge of what has gone before. David Bleich, in his pedagogical study *Readings and Feelings*, explores what he calls the ‘verbal restlessness of a single word’ that, through recurrent usage, establishes a baseline for interpretation within a text.<sup>40</sup> In *Confessio*, this locating device provides a good starting point to ‘setten’ a conclusion. The ‘restless’ term I wish to consider that recurs at the verbal epicentre of Gower’s barren wilderness is the verb *duelle*, a term Gower uses provocatively in the pointing of his conclusion. Not only do old books ‘dwell’ in this unstable, fault-ridden domain, so do people — all people:

Ther is no regne of alle outtake,  
 For every climat hath his diel  
*After the tornyng of the whiel*  
 Which blinde Fortune overthoweth,  
 Wheroft *the certain* no man knoweth.  
 The hevene wot what is to done,  
 Bot we that *duelle* under the *mone*  
 Stande in this world *upon a weir*  
 (Prol.136–43, emphasis mine)

The moon, that most changeable of planets beneath whose sphere blind Fortune’s wheel fills people with doubt (‘upon a weir’), demarcates the domain where all people ‘duelle’.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> David Bleich, *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975), pp. 57–58.

<sup>41</sup> Gower uses the metaphor dozens of times to locate people in transient, unstable situations: e.g., the Christian Pope Sylvester, hiding from the Roman Emperor’s troops, ‘duelleth’ on

We have seen how Gower uses geometry to provide a cognitive geography for navigating unknown terrain to contrive conclusions. One such wrapping-up device is the circle with which he joins the beginning with the end.<sup>42</sup> In shaping his ending Gower evokes the ‘dwelling’ trope with which he began. Where at the outset (Prol.2) he cited ancient writers whose ‘bokes duelle’ with us still, he now returns to those books at the admonition of Venus who, having given ‘John Gower’ a string of prayer beads *Por reposer*, tells him to leave her court to go instead where ‘vertu moral duelleth, | Wher ben thi bokes, as men telleth, | Whiche of long time thou hast write’ (VIII.2925–27). The syntax of the passage is fascinating, in that its sense may be parsed in different ways. Macaulay reads ‘thi bokes’ in line 2926 as reference to Gower’s earlier, philosophical works, the *Speculum hominis* (i.e., the *Mirour de l’Omme*) and *Vox Clamantis* (see his note to 8.2926), the point being that ‘Gower’ should put aside his indulgences on love in the *Confessio* to return to more serious matters. If this is the correct reading, the sense of the passage as a concluding devise bears a likeness to Chaucer’s Retraction to the *Canterbury Tales*, in which Chaucer puts aside his dream visions, *Troilus*, ‘the tales of Caunterbury that sownen into synne’, ‘many a song and many a lecherous lay’, etc., to thank God rather for his translation of *Boece de consolacione*, homilies, and works of morality and devotion. That is, when Venus tells Gower to put aside this trivial love debate (i.e., the *Confessio Amantis*) to hearken back to his more serious books, written in French and Latin, it amounts to a retraction.

But ‘thi bokes’ could refer to Gower’s library in general, in which case the circle would be completed in another way: the sense of line 2627 might be: the books ‘[out of] which you have for many years written’.<sup>43</sup> This interpretation ties the

a mountain (*CA*, II.3378), where the term couples dwelling with living amidst uncertainty. Or, again, Usury, we are told, ‘duelleth’ with the rich (*CA*, V.4395, where the verb implies perpetuity — an instantaneous and iterative aspect of being); similarly, Ravine ‘duelleth’ (hangs out perpetually) among ‘the maistres’ (V.5509); or Flattery ‘duelleth’ (moves about) among courtiers (VII.2330). ‘Duelle’ situates Apollonius’s daughter Thaise precariously in Tharse, before Dionise becomes jealous and would murder her (VIII.1325). She is whisked across the sea by pirates, then left to dwell in a house of prostitution. And so on.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the best statement on the philosophical tradition behind the trope of concluding with a circle is *Boece*, III.m.11: ‘Whoso that seketh sooth by a deep thought, and conveyteth not to ben disseyvid by no misweyes, lat hym rollen and trenden withynne hymself the lyght of his ynwarde sighte; and let hym gaderyn ayein, enclynyng into a compas, the longe moevynges of his thoughtes; and let hym techyn his corage that he hath enclosid and hid in his tresors all that he compasseth or secheth fro withoute’ (Chaucer’s translation).

<sup>43</sup> Prepositions are an unstable component of Middle English as they rapidly multiply in the fourteenth century to make up for the loss of inflections as the language moves toward analytic

passage neatly to Prologue, line 2, which, in the voice of 'Gower' before he introduced Genius and Amans into his plot, placed such value on the pedagogical power of old books; in this reading, Venus sends the poet back to his library rather than his earlier writing. This scenario ties in in interesting ways with another concluding device in Chaucer. Rather than implying a retraction, the god of love's admonition is akin to the demands of Alceste and Cupid upon Geoffrey at the end of the F text of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (ll. 556–77), where the poet is sent back to his books and told to write about virtuous wives. Gower has not been ordered to write further, but the demand to study 'vertu moral' (VIII.2625) found in books is similar to the gist in Chaucer.

Parallels of this sort suggest not so much one poet imitating the other as the fact that both are part of a mutual readership, a circle of literary friends whose taste is alike and who enjoy doing similar things, albeit in different ways, for their mutual amusement. When Chaucer talks about 'old bokes' being 'the olde feldes' from which 'cometh al this newe corn [...] this newe science that men lere' (*Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 22–25), he demonstrates that he and Gower, with his theory of 'vertu moral' in 'old bokes', are of the same editorial school.

In the conclusion to Book VIII, as in the Prologue where Gower first spoke of books as the dwelling place of moral virtue, Gower emphasizes once again the instability of the fallen world. But now, instead of using Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the sublunar realm of Fortune (Prol.136–43) to mark corruptibility of temporalities, he simply addresses the fickleness of the world. As Venus warns: 'If thou thin hele wolt pourchace, | Thou miht noght make suite and chace, | Wher that the game is nougnt pernable' (VIII.2929–31). That is, if health is what he hopes to gain (or, rather, to *pourchace*, or redeem), he is hunting in the wrong place, a place 'nougt pernable' (i.e., unsuitable, inappropriate — VIII.2931). Gower then heightens the reader's sense of instability as Venus announces her departure: 'for y mot fro thee wende' (VIII.2940, emphasis mine). Though Venus's proper domain is beyond that of the moon, it is, nonetheless, still among the moveable spheres. Her 'wending', like his 'dwelling', is none too secure. Although she ends 'enclosid in a sterred sky' (VIII.2942), the enclosure is more one

structures that determine sense by word order. *In*, *of*, *on* often appear to be interchangeable or lie hidden within demonstrative and relative pronouns (e.g., *whiche* = 'of which'). See Tauno Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax*, pt I: *Parts of Speech* (Helsinki: Société Néophilologique, 1960), pp. 195–97 and 345–422 but especially p. 197 n. 2, where *whiche* might represent 'an old inflected genitive, being comparable to the non-periphrastic dative *which* (instead of *to which* 'to whom')'. Mustanoja cites Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1418, as an example of the construction.

of a hard-to-distinguish multiplicity, rather than the ‘certain’ stability of oneness,<sup>44</sup> at least to the eye of ‘John Gower’, who remarks that she has simply disappeared — a single detail lost in the many.

What is most disturbing for the reader of this ending is the desolation of ‘John Gower’ in his isolated loneliness. He takes leave of Venus not of his own volition, but because she has abandoned him. And so too with Genius, ‘hire prest’, who, ‘be me liefe or be me loth, | Out of my sighte forth he goth, | And y was left withouten helpe’ (VIII.2948–51). In his helplessness, all ‘John Gower’ knows for certain is that he has lost his ‘time’ (VIII.2953–54). All has turned into ‘nought’, and he is left ‘amasid’ (VIII.2956–57), without adequate vision for guidance — that is, until he takes things in hand, returns home, and re-creates an *idea* of the state of England through his thoughtful prayers.

One subtext of Gower’s poem is truth, a concept akin to that found in Chaucer’s ‘Truth: Balade de Bon Conseyl’, with its advice to ‘Fle fro the prees and dwelle with sothfastnesse [...] Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernessse’ (ll. 1 and 17). Like Chaucer, Gower would direct his prayer toward personal and common profit (‘For the, and eek for other’ — ‘Truth’, l. 27). But Gower’s prayer is directed less toward ‘hevenlich mede’, as Chaucer’s is (l. 27), but rather toward a humanistic peace on earth. His conclusion acknowledges the corruptions of this world — fragmented, deceitful, self-serving, hard to read. Certainly there is not much to be hopeful about in the contemporaneous vanity and arbitrary behaviour of a vindictive Richard in 1392.<sup>45</sup> The concluding resolve of *Mirour de l’Omme* transpired in a celebration of the Virgin Mary’s intervention on behalf of humankind. The conclusion to *Confessio*, on the other hand, is more like that of *Vox Clamantis* in its pessimism. The first recension of *Confessio* ended with some sense of hope in its praise of Chaucer which resonated pleasingly against the Arion passage at the end of the Prologue, thereby acknowledging the value of the arts — new books as well as old — as a stay against Fortune’s chaos. But in his 1392 re-editing of his conclusion, Gower addresses head-on the instability of the world.

The conclusion of the Lancastrian revision of *Confessio Amantis*, with its emphasis on the welfare of England, opens up possibilities of a new community among his readers, one contingent not on Gower’s will, but on the will of his readers — sojourners all. Gower’s prayer acknowledges the recurrent failure of all

<sup>44</sup> See Prol.140 on lack of certitude under blind Fortune ‘wherof the certain no man knoweth’.

<sup>45</sup> On the King’s growing arrogance and Gower’s response in the early 1390s, see my ‘The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower: Ideas of Kingship and Real Kings’, in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 215–38.

three estates in their clandestine business dealings, what Chaucer had called 'climbing tikelnesse' ('Truth', l. 3). As merchants imagine security in 'the lucre of marchandie, | Compassement and tricherie | Of singuler profit' (VIII.3037–39) and the great sins 'of divisoun | Which many a noble worthi toun | Fro welthe and fro prosperité | Hath brought to gret aduersite' (VIII.3041–44), the poet contemplates by juxtaposition a world in which, *if* 'these astatz amendid were | So that the vertus stodyn there | And that the vices were aweie', then 'this londis grace schulde arise' (VIII.3049–53). *If* allegiance *were* to be seen between clerk, knight, and man of law (VIII.3059), indeed, 'mechil grace' (VIII.3046) might fall upon the cities. But Gower knows that the chance of that happening is infinitesimal. As in Chaucer's *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, the king would have to leave vice and remember his covenants with the people. He would need to lead and govern in such a manner that there would be no tyranny (VIII.3070–79):

For if a kyng wol justifie  
 His lond and hem that beth withynne,  
 First at hymself he mot begynne,  
 To kepe and ruel his owne astat,  
 That in hymself be no debat  
 Toward his God: for othre wise  
 Ther may non erthly kyng suffise  
 Of his kyngdom the folk to lede,  
 Bot he the kyng of hevene drede.

(VIII.3080–88)

Gower's vision here is utopian. It celebrates right use of will and belief in the 'vertu moral' (VIII.2925) upon which the state was supposed to have been founded. Though Gower's concluding vision is political, it is also highly personal. It reads like a prayer for 'self', only now it is the full readerly self, linked in positive communal ways to past, present, and (through his audience) the future. But the likelihood of the prayer being accomplished is small, about as likely as the beautiful woman seen in the well in fact being Narcissus.

Gower is asking, in effect, that people become better readers. To deal with the problematics of fallen times, he appropriates a theological interpretation that he projects geometrically to define a different kind of dwelling from wandering in a post-Edenic chaos, a dwelling (abiding) in the house of the Lord. His prayer suggests that the only reclamation of the present possible is through triangulation with the high majesty of God who sets the ideological point of a completable text within John Gower's rightful domain: the apex is with God, but the baseline (from the law to the people) is in England.

The final lines of the poem ‘now upon my laste tide’ (VIII.3138) reiterate the need to know ‘how to governe’ one’s estate which every day stands in debate with itself. This too is a utopic exercise in reading/editing. Under the guidance of ‘my muse’ Gower puts aside for a final time blind love, which, ‘of his dedly hele, | Which no phisicien can hele | For his nature is so divers’, is, without doubt, inadequate (VIII.3140–61). He turns instead to

thilke love which that is  
 Withinne a mannes herte affermed,  
 And stant of charité confermed:  
 Such love is goodly for to have,  
 Such love mai the body save,  
 Such love mai the soule amende.  
 The hyhe God such love ous sende  
 Forwith the remenant of grace,  
 So that above in thilke place  
 Wher resteth love and alle pes,  
 Oure joie mai ben endeles.

(VIII.3162–72)<sup>46</sup>

‘Charité’ is a noble image invoked to affirm the true aspirations of the people. The poem’s Latin *Explicit* confirms the point of the whole reading/editing exercise:

Explicit iste liber, qui transeat, obsecro liber  
 Vt sine liuore vigeat lectoris in ore.  
 Qui sedet in scannis celi det vt ista Johannis  
 Perpetuis omnis stet pagina grata Britannis.  
 Derbeie Copmiti, recolunt quem laude periti,  
 Vade liber purus, sub eo requiesce futuras.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Once again Gower introduces a concluding formula based on anaphora (‘Such love [...] Such love [...] Such love’; VIII.3165–67), which resonates against the Epilogue of Chaucer’s *Troilus*, where Chaucer evokes a similar concluding effect with an anaphora sequence of ‘Swich fyn [...] Swich fyn [...] Swich fyn [...] etc.]’ (TC, v.1828–32). The effect, once again, is to affirm the common expectations of a late fourteenth-century vernacular readership centred in the court and legal circles of Chaucer, Gower, Usk, Hoccleve, and classical rhetoric.

<sup>47</sup> This line draws the final readerly parallel with Chaucer in the creating of a conclusion, though here the script is in Latin. Compare Gower’s *Vade liber purus* with the beginning of Chaucer’s Epilogue to *Troilus and Criseyde*, ‘Go litel bok, go, litel myn tragedye’ (v.1786), where Chaucer sends his book forth to kiss the steps of ‘Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace’ (v.1792). Gower’s commission is more pedagogically in keeping with the noble politics of his

(Here ends this book, and may it, I implore, travel free so that without a bruise it may thrive in the reader's ear. May He who sits in the throne of heaven grant that this page of John remain for all time pleasing to the Britains. Go, spotless book, to the Count of Derby, whom the learned honor with praise, and take repose when you will be in his keeping.)<sup>48</sup>

The *Explicit* sums up the thesis of this essay succinctly. Gower, as editor/reader, brought forth from old books an idea that his poem begets anew, in hope that it may abide (dwell) freely amidst a new community who will help to edit it (*e-dare*, 'to bring forth, beget, raise up') intelligently. The community will live as an idea that resides/dwells in the ear of its readers as long as it remains pleasing to them — these Britains whom Gower prays God will bless. He sends forth his book under the keeping of a good man, Henry Bolingbroke, knowing that health within the state is dependent on good leadership and good rule. That hope, set in a prayer, reflects a deep-seated anxiety on Gower's part: will his book have any influence whatsoever? In his trusting way, he hopes it will. But whether that trust is optimistic or pessimistic only the reader can determine.

*Confessio*, as he moves beyond poets to send the book to the Count of Derby in hope that his political influence might help to institute a reign of peace and repose — the most happy future that Gower can imagine — 'sub eo requiesce futuras'.

<sup>48</sup> Trans. by Andrew Galloway.



# GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*, THE *PRICK OF CONSCIENCE*, AND THE HISTORY OF THE LATIN GLOSS IN EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE

Andrew Galloway

Glossing has a certain notoriety in the poetry that we often use to define 'the origins of modern English literature'. To the friar presented in Chaucer's 'Summoner's Tale', 'glosyng is a glorious thyng', gloriously displayed in his inventive manipulation of texts, words, and didactic themes tailored to his endless professional ambition. But the term comprises so much of his voluble talk that neither we nor his lay listener, Thomas, ever seem to hear the text, or the truth, that is being glossed: all we hear is his endless glossing.<sup>1</sup> The Wife of Bath similarly speaks of glosses as something other than the real point, and something that she sees through and speaks against — both in the form of implausible clerical interpretations of texts and deceptive male flattery of women, on both counts a sure way of seducing as well as outraging her ('so wel koude he me glose'; III.509). Yet her discourse too is almost entirely glossing of her own sort: reflections on sexual, domestic, and (especially) bookish 'experience' in which we hear her voice as a glossator and compiler reacting to texts, debates, and events, for whose meaning we are made heavily dependent upon her. Indeed, the effect of her discourse is to insist on the impossibility of access to unbiased truth: everything becomes a further gloss, including her rejections of traditional, clerical, or masculine glossing.

In Chaucer, glossing looms as a spectre outside of the realm of vernacular voices and vernacular authority, a commandingly directive and manipulative authority

<sup>1</sup> See *Canterbury Tales*, III.1793. Quotations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

from the world of Latin, clerical culture. But its functions are not only challenged and often displaced by English poetry, but also absorbed into that poetry, which takes up the explanatory and multiple-voicing of glossing, though for a very different range of poetic purposes than the tradition of the academic or clerical gloss itself. Indeed, although manuscripts of Chaucer often carry actual Latin glosses (generally occluded in modern editions along with other signs of his 'medieval' identity), such glossing of Middle English manuscripts is relatively rare, and generally thin when it appears, occupying little more than a minor supporting role rather than anything like the formidable presence that Chaucer's characters, at least, seem to react to.

The great exception to this faint tradition of Latin glosses on English poetry has always seemed to be John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. There, Latin glosses are sustained with striking consistency in the manuscript tradition and throughout the poem. At a minimum, they seem to grant a degree of authority, or a posture of that authority, to the English that puts it on the level of the Bible, or Ovid. Yet while copious Latin glossing, like the Latin verse at the beginning of chapters, is an integral part of his greatest English poem — even, I shall suggest below, a primary part of its composition — its authorizing function is established in large, blandly summarizing terms rather than in more particular demonstrations of its special revelation of the English text, to whose details, in fact, Gower's glosses make only the most distant and general reference. It seems neither a body of material to be pondered in detail, nor an encouragement to examine the English more closely. As an experiment in glossing, it seems to be the exception that proves the rule: Gower's glossing supports the sense that Latin glosses on English are far less significant than the medieval tradition of glossing allows, and certainly less formidable than the spectre of powerful glossing that Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims assume. This suggests that we need a fuller history of Latin glosses of English verse to appreciate its dynamic if ghostly functions, certainly to appreciate the unusual role that Gower cast it in.

The footnote, that product of the post-medieval world of print, has received a full intellectual history, at least in its tradition through the historical narrative.<sup>2</sup> Its older cousin and antecedent the gloss, that quintessential element of medieval manuscript-culture, has not. Largely this is because the gloss is so boundlessly pervasive in Latin medieval literary culture especially, conveying the tools and background presumed necessary not only to appreciate and understand classical

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

poetry in the terms important to the Middle Ages, but also to appreciate and understand contemporary medieval Latin poetry, and of course much else.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps too, however, the medieval literary gloss in England has received no history because it is so little manifested in medieval English literature, and still less so in English literature thereafter. The most closely studied contemporary glosses to an English poem are not medieval at all, but those by 'E. K.' to Spenser's *Shephearde's Calender* (1579), where E. K. has also framed Spenser's eclogues with 'arguments' and a succession of 'emblems' (mottos) in Latin and French. Yet those glosses are notable mainly because they 'raise unhelpful assistance to a new power', some presenting explanations that add further obscurity, others that are vapidly redundant, and still others that teasingly speculate about the contemporary identities of various characters 'buried in the Authors conceipt', all adding interest to the unanswerable question of whether E. K. is Spenser himself or some whimsical Cambridge associate.<sup>4</sup>

To understand this stunted history, including the circumstance of a late medieval English poetics that exploits the idea of glossing without including much of its reality, we need to consider an alternate tradition of Latin glossing of English poetry that points toward possibilities not otherwise exploited in the English literary tradition, even by Gower. Some fragments of this 'alternate tradition' (if so small a body of instances can be so called) can be instanced by a handful of copies of a very widely distributed English poem that presents an antecedent and parallel to Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1390–98), but in the way that a real confessor would serve as antecedent and parallel to an artful secular impersonator

<sup>3</sup> Excellent direct instances of the medieval glossing tradition of Latin literature, ancient and contemporary, are available in, e.g., *The Vulgate' Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Creation Myth and the Story of Orpheus*, ed. by Frank T. Coulson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); *The Fables of Walter of England*, ed. by Aaron E. Wright (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), and *An Epitome of Biblical History: Glosses on Walter of Châtillon's Alexandreis 4.176–274*, ed. by David Townsend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Many of the glosses to the last work are available in the full Latin edition of the *Alexandreis* by Marvin Colker (Padova: Antenore, 1978), pp. 275–514; a selection of those are included in the translation, Walter of Châtillon, *The Alexandreis: A Twelfth-Century Epic*, trans. by David Townsend (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas M. Cain, introduction to *The Shephearde's Calender*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William A. Oram and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 6, and gloss to November l. 38 (p. 196). See also David Shore, 'E.K.', in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 231; a thumbnail history of 'glossing', one of the few I have found, also appears in that volume: Gerald Snare, 'Glossing', p. 334. Note, however, the new online compendium of essays and bibliographies, *The Glossator*, <<http://ojs.gc.cuny.edu/index.php/glossator/>> [accessed June 2009].

of a priest. The poem known in medieval and modern times as the *Prick of Conscience* (probably mid-fourteenth century) offers in this sense a precise counterpoint to Gower's *Confessio*. Just as Gower's work treats the sins of love in seven books, so the *Prick of Conscience* in its seven parts, or books (variously demarcated in the copies), occupying 9624 lines, treats in orderly fashion the 'wrechedness of mans kynde', the 'unstabelnes of þis werld', the nature of death, the nature of purgatory, the day of judgement, the pains of hell, and the joys of heaven. Designed to be a handbook for real priests seeking to guide their flock, it is thus quite amenable to summary — thus too all the less likely to be read by modern literary scholars, even those seeking to learn about centrally significant and widely promoted materials in late medieval English culture:

wha-swa can noght drede may lere,  
 þat þis tretice wil rede or here;  
 Yf þai rede or here, til þe hende,  
 þe maters þat er þar-in contende,  
 And undirstand þam al and trow,  
 Parchaunce þair hertes þan sal bow,  
 Thurgh drede þat þai sal consayve þar by,  
 To wirk gude werkes and fle foli.  
 Parfor þis buke es on Ynglese drawen,  
 Of sere maters, þat er unknawen  
 Til laude men þat er unkunnand,  
 þat can na latyn understand.<sup>5</sup>

One could not find a more widespread English poem, nor one so obviously useful and used. The body of 115 known manuscripts is an extraordinary group, displaying the full range of late medieval English manuscript production. The author is unknown, the assumed date not precise or proven. No one has attempted to unravel in any detail the textual tradition, and the diversity of readings of the English poem in these witnesses is enough to make the only modern edition (by Morris in 1863), a transcription of just one copy with variants from just one other, seem but one instance of the work's text and presentation. Most (but not all) copies of the work include Latin lines attributed to various authorities, usually

<sup>5</sup> *The Pricke of Conscience (Stimulus Conscientiae), A Northumbrian Poem by Richard Rolle de Hampole*, ed. by Richard Morris (Berlin: Asher, 1863), ll. 328–39. Further citations are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text, unless otherwise noted. A new edition by James H. Morey, based exclusively on New Haven, Beinecke Library, MS Osborn a.13, is forthcoming (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications).

inserted in the text column (as the copy Morris used does) but sometimes presented as marginalia, in the kind of minor variation of where such Latin ends up that is displayed in some Gower manuscripts too.<sup>6</sup>

In its schematic concern with the varieties of sin and the nature of penance, redemption, and the judgements of the afterlife, the *Prick of Conscience* stands squarely in the world of real confession that constituted so central a cultural concern in late medieval England, and which Gower's *Confessio Amantis* so urbanely parodies and transforms. In further anticipation of Gower's formal strategy, several copies of the *Prick of Conscience* also include further, sometimes extensive Latin glosses. These bespeak directly the vibrant utility of that context of confessional practice and moral theology. Five other copies present full Latin translations.<sup>7</sup> Here, in this mid-fourteenth-century poem, appears the most systematic and sustained use of Latin glossing to English verse ever to emerge, offering both a direct model for, and an illuminating departure from, virtually every other use of Latin prose within and around early English poetry. The case presents a particularly useful way to ponder the meaning of the relation between text and gloss in the *Confessio Amantis* as well.

As Alastair Minnis has well noted, in a brief study that offers the closest thing to a history of the failure of the Latin gloss in English literature, there is a striking paucity of such glossing of English poetry by comparison with other European vernacular literatures. As other vernacular literatures gained literary status and

<sup>6</sup> Of copies of the *Prick of Conscience*, London, British Library (hereafter BL), MS Harley 2377 presents the Latin quotations as marginalia; other copies include it in the text column. Among copies of Gower, Cambridge, University Library, MS Mm.2.21, the work of a series of scribes, sometimes shifts the marginal Latin to the text column, to fill out the space allotted to a given scribe. Oxford, Bodleian Library (hereafter Bodleian), MS Bodley 902 shifts the Latin verses out to the margin for the same purposes after fol. 81; and BL, MS Add. 12043, an expensively decorated copy, presents very awkward solutions to fitting the Latin glosses into his vellum's unruled margins, apparently since his exemplar had the glosses in the column; after Book II of the poem he ceases altogether to include them. Yet the regular presentation of the glosses in most of the early copies — in the margins, with the English text and Latin verses in a regular two-column presentation — is remarkably consistent. See Richard Emmerson, 'Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture: Latin and English in Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 143–86; and Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 73–97 (pp. 82, 91).

<sup>7</sup> See Robert E. Lewis and Angus McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the Prick of Conscience*, Medium Ævum Monographs, n.s. 12 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1982).

authority in the later Middle Ages, they gained traditions of glosses. English poetry as a rule did not. Minnis's explanation of this 'crisis of vernacular commentary' in England is that this was the result of concerns about religious heresy, for which English writings were vigilantly monitored from the early fifteenth century on.<sup>8</sup> The argument contradicts the overt claims of most Middle English poets (and most modern scholars), who imply that glosses would be ways of containing and controlling meanings of a vernacular text that might otherwise — unglossed — raise challenges to orthodox theological views. Although poets like Chaucer insist that glosses served to confine and censor the 'naked text', Minnis suggests that glosses would spell trouble. In either case, however, the thinness of Latin glosses to English works does not suddenly manifest in 1409, when scrutiny of English writings for heretical possibilities began in earnest after the Oxford Constitutions established severe penalties for heresy in the vernacular in particular. In fact, that legislation seems to have directly inspired some, although halting, new glossing. The Latin glosses on Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, for instance, make clearer than the English translation itself that text's position against Lollardy.<sup>9</sup> But even defensively orthodox glossing in this period did not mark the beginning of a very productive tradition. Only a handful of examples using glosses to emphasize the orthodoxy of materials in English from this period are known. One is in the fifteenth-century English translation of Marguerite Porete's early fourteenth-century Latin (and possibly French) *Mirror of Simple Souls*, for which Marguerite herself was burned as a heretic in 1310. Marguerite's fifteenth-century Middle English translator, 'M. N.', carefully glossed risky passages to show that they were not to be taken literally or not in the heretical ways that his author explicitly presents them. Yet no abundant tradition of other anti-heretical glossing seems to have followed in its wake. M. N.'s own glossing seems an afterthought. In his preface he says that he added these glosses only after discovering that such passages 'haue be mystake' (either 'have been misunderstood' or 'have been ill received').<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Alastair Minnis, 'Absent Glosses: A Crisis of Vernacular Commentary in Late-Medieval England?', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 20 (2003), 1–17 (repr. as 'Absent Glosses: The Trouble with Middle English Hermeneutics', in Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Culture: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 17–37).

<sup>9</sup> See the introduction in *Nicholas Love: The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. by Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See 'Margaret Porete: "The Mirror of Simple Souls", a Middle English Translation', with appendix by Edmund Colledge and Romana Guarneri, 'The Glosses by "M. N." and Richard Methley to "The Mirror of Simple Souls"', ed. by Marilyn Doiron, *Archivio italiano per la storia*

Nor did actively 'heretical' glosses on English writings develop more vigorously. The English glosses on the Wycliffite Bible of the early fifteenth century, and the entire 'Glossed Gospel', a tissue of commentary in English produced by the Wycliffites, are elaborate and learned ancillaries to 'that serious study of the Bible in the vernacular which, it has always been recognized, it was the intention of Wyclif and his associates to encourage'.<sup>11</sup> Standard authorities are quoted and cited (in English), alternate translations suggested, aspects of moral theology are elaborated, and in sum the glosses are generally orthodox or uncontroversial, resembling the tradition of glossing the Bible with the 'Ordinary Gloss' and Nicholas of Lyra. Yet even here, the tradition of glossing English writings reached a limit far short of the comparable Latin tradition. Few of the Wycliffite biblical books actually receive such sustained glossing;<sup>12</sup> only two out of more than two hundred extant manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible display substantial glosses on the Gospels themselves (Bodleian, MS Laud 36, and Wiltshire, Longleat House, MS 5).<sup>13</sup>

The puzzle, in fact, is not only why English poetry did not follow the trajectory of other European vernacular literatures in gaining glosses, but also why English poetry seems to invoke the spectre of Latin glossing, and even to provide the Latin indications in the poetry, while displaying so little of the substance. Crucial as Latin clearly was to late medieval English poems like *Piers Plowman* and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and as the idea of Latin glossing was to Chaucer, Latin marginal glossing of English in this learned and exploratory period of English poetry is rare and muted, regardless of issues of orthodoxy or heresy. It is true that the early copies of the *Canterbury Tales* presents several 'traditions' of Latin glosses by the mid-fifteenth century, some of which may reach back to Chaucer's lifetime or shortly after; such glosses are sometimes given ample room in the manuscripts and, as Graham Caie noted in a seminal essay of 1976, some present biblical references highlighting the satire of the English as well as identifying its Latin

*della pietà*, 5 (1968), 241–355; see also Valerie Lagorio and Michael Sargent (with Ritamary Bradley), 'English Mystical Writings', in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967–), IX, ed. by Albert E. Hartung (1991), pp. 3049–3137, 3405–71; item 73, at pp. 3117–18.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Hargreaves, 'The Marginal Glosses to the Wycliffite New Testament', *Studia Neophilologica*, 33 (1961), 285–300 (p. 300).

<sup>12</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 235–37.

<sup>13</sup> Hargreaves, 'Marginal Glosses', pp. 294–99.

sources.<sup>14</sup> So too, copies of *Troilus and Criseyde* show several textual lineages of glosses (in English as well as Latin). But nearly all such materials present only brief annotations noting sources or rhetorical units ('cantus Troili', for example).<sup>15</sup> Very few copies of either work have more extensive annotation. The copy best known by modern critics (to the extent that any are widely known) is BL, MS Egerton 2864, presenting the *Canterbury Tales*, which includes in glosses extracts of Latin sources on women (chiefly the Bible and *Adversus Jovinianum*) that the Wife of Bath contradicts or manipulates, or which are implied by her opposite assertions. This instance Susan Schibanoff wittily defined as a 'struggle' between a real clerical reader and Chaucer's caricature of a woman exegete.<sup>16</sup> The comparison even in this case, however, shows all the more clearly that the balance of energy and variety of commentary is on the Wife's side. One copy of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson poet. 163, has over a hundred small marginal rhetorical indicators and comments, the most of any copy of that poem; most other copies have only a small number, some, like BL, MSS Harley 3943 and 1239, only one or two.<sup>17</sup> A famous unfinished de luxe copy of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 61, has blanks that just might have been intended for glosses, rather than (as usually thought) more illustrations. But the claim is speculative, and at most it assumes that the final text would have had only the simple glosses found on other copies of *Troilus*, which 'emphasize the narrative structure of the text [...] in the manner of chapter headings or rubrics'.<sup>18</sup>

Gower's Latin apparatus is in a different league from this, but his glossing is still remarkably limited, albeit in different ways. Certainly, the Latin verses in the *Confessio Amantis* — that is, the passages in elegiac couplets that open many

<sup>14</sup> Graham D. Caie, 'The Significance of the Early Chaucer Manuscript Glosses (with Special Reference to the *Wife of Bath's Prologue*)', *Chaucer Review*, 10 (1976), 350–60.

<sup>15</sup> A selection of the glosses in manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* are included in *The Text of the 'Canterbury Tales'*, ed. by John Matthews Manly and Edith Rickert, 8 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), III, 483–527; those in manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde* are collected in C. David Benson and Barry A. Windeatt, 'The Manuscript Glosses to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Chaucer Review*, 25 (1990–91), 33–53. See also Julia Boffey, 'Annotation in Some Manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 5 (1995), 1–17.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Schibanoff, 'The New Reader and Female Textuality in Two Early Commentaries on Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 10 (1988), 71–108.

<sup>17</sup> Boffey, 'Annotation', pp. 9–10.

<sup>18</sup> Phillipa Hardman, 'Interpreting the Incomplete Scheme of Illustration in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61', *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 6 (1997), 52–69 (p. 61).

sections — have some significant ambiguities and literary and intellectual value, beyond the basic function of summarizing the ‘sin’ to follow.<sup>19</sup> But the *Confessio*’s prose Latin glosses strike a duller and, seemingly, far less complex posture. Apart from some notable exceptions they are important in large impression rather than, it seems, in detail. As Minnis points out, the Latin gloss at the opening of the first book of the *Confessio*, itself a kind of ‘intrinsic prologue’ (thus replacing the Latin tradition of that kind of glossing apparatus), echoes the tradition of *accessus ad auctores* used for the books of the Bible, since it defines the author’s intention to display the forms of ‘that love by which not only human kind but also all living things naturally are made subject’; that gloss also suggests the form his work will follow (another typical aspect of the *accessus*) by noting that ‘the matter of the book is spread out more specially on these topics throughout its length’.<sup>20</sup> In the same vein, the following gloss describes how Gower’s narrator transforms himself into or reveals himself as a frustrated lover: ‘hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se aucto<sup>r</sup> esse Amantem’ (by I.61). This gloss implies a high degree of literary self-consciousness, claiming, as Minnis remarks, ‘in the third person, what Gower could not have said with decorum in the first person, thereby making his would-be *auctor* an actual *actor*'.<sup>21</sup> The moment resembles that of Boccaccio’s gloss in the *Teseida* (III.35.5–8) on a passage describing how Love mistreats his servants: ‘che sono io’ (which I am).<sup>22</sup> Here, at least, Gower’s gloss on himself fashioning himself as a lover manages to be literarily astute and highly original; for all of its relatively functionless pedantry and characteristic flatness of expression, it does not simply present the author ‘fashioning’ himself as a lover; rather, it presents a vernacular poet ‘fashioning’ himself as an authoritative glos-sator of an English work.

Occasionally, Gower’s glosses present details not found in the English. For instance, Gower’s glosses sometimes supply political particulars that the English coyly avoids, such as the names and dates of Richard II and Henry of Derby,

<sup>19</sup> See especially Siân Echard and Claire Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the ‘Confessio Amantis’: An Annotated Translation* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> *Confessio*, I.9, gl.; see A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scolar, 1984), p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> Minnis, *Medieval Theory*, p. 189.

<sup>22</sup> See Thomas C. Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), pp. 3–12; Alastair Minnis, *Magister Amoris: The ‘Roman de la Rose’ and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 276–78. Neither draws the parallel to Gower.

between whom Gower seems to have shifted his dedication (at Prol.25, and VIII.2975), or the name of the antipope Clement VII (at Prol.195). These ‘political’ glosses seem to represent a different layer and kind of composition — perhaps even a post-1399 attempt to look like a Lancastrian all along.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes the glosses offer a more specific explanation for how Gower has changed a tale’s original form, as, in Gower, when Narcissus falls in love with an image of a nymph that the Latin gloss says poets call Ecco, while the English verse leaves his love for his own image as simply and all the more oddly as love for ‘such a Nimphe as tho was faie’ (at I.2295). A slightly more ‘literary’ flourish is visible in the glosses to book 7, the ‘mirror for princes’ book, where a sequence of a dozen glosses (at ll. 979–1215) may cumulatively be scanned like the Latin verses as elegiac couplets. Those, however, lack all trace of the other literary features of the Latin verses, such as their puns, allusions, and general syntactic, lexical, and formal density. They remain essentially prosaic.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the purposes of the glosses, it is evident, as Joyce Coleman observes, that the rare features of interest just noted would be visible only to a relatively narrow class of readers, those not only knowing Latin but also able ‘to understand and apply the *idea* of reading interpretive (as opposed to merely explanatory) glosses against text’. Such readers would be accustomed to finding more ‘learned’ or pointed details as well as ‘higher’ principles of meaning.<sup>25</sup> Coleman ingeniously

<sup>23</sup> See Terry Jones, Robert Yeager, Terry Dolan, Alan Fletcher, and Juliette Dor, *Who Murdered Chaucer? A Medieval Mystery* (New York: Dunn, 2003), pp. 100–03. The point depends on Gower’s gloss and verse there calling Henry of Derby ‘Henry of Lancaster’, which the authors think impossible before 1399; wider enquiry, however, seems needed to test this proposition. See also, more emphatically, Wim Lindeboom, ‘Rethinking the Recensions of the *Confessio Amantis*’, *Viator*, forthcoming. Though I disagree with Lindeboom’s view that all of Gower’s glosses were imposed as a late stage of his reframing of his poem (see further below), the argument brings welcome further attention to how Gower’s glosses interact with his English verse. I thank Dr Lindeboom for allowing me to read his essay in advance of its publication.

<sup>24</sup> See John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway, TEAMS, Middle English Text Series, 3 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000–05), note at III, 448–49.

<sup>25</sup> Joyce Coleman, ‘Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower May Have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to Be Read’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 24 (2002), 209–35 (p. 210). For stimulating assessments of how various presentations and even English translations or partial translations of the Latin glosses show the unsteady authority in the structure Gower created, see Siân Echard, ‘With Carmen’s Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*’, *Studies in Philology*, 95 (1998), 1–40, and ‘Glossing Gower: In Latin, in English, and *in absentia*: The Case of Bodleian Aschmole 35’, in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC:

proposes that the Latin prose glosses would allow clerics reading the English verses of the *Confessio Amantis* aloud (at court or elsewhere) to con the stories quickly and be prepared to discuss extemporaneously their moral points.<sup>26</sup> But they would not in fact be able to offer very much more than the non-Latin literate readers and listeners would already gather, and in fact they might seem simply duller epigone of the narrating confessor in the English poetry itself. It seems strange to suggest that Gower would be deliberately setting up such performing expositors to seem slightly more pedantic and slightly less competent than Genius himself. But it is even more difficult to imagine that anyone declaiming these further interpretive comments would muster much awe for intellectual powers among Richard's sophisticated courtly audience.

The largest point of Gower's glosses that has been recognized is, in fact, simply the authorizing that such Latin and learned attention would broadly confer upon his poem. This reaches its apex in the Latin colophon, found in all but three of the fifteen complete manuscripts of the *Confessio*. A kind of finale to the glosses, the colophon declares the high purposes of his labours, and is followed by summaries and titles of the three 'books' (*libri*) he has written — the *Mirour de l'Omme*, *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*:

Quia vnumquisque, prout a deo accepit, aliis impartiri tenetur, Iohannes Gower super hiis que deus sibi sensualiter donauit villacionis sue racionem, dum tempus instat, secundum aliquid alleuiare cupiens, inter labores et ocia ad aliorum noticiam tres libros doc trine causa forma subsequenti propterea compositus.<sup>27</sup>

(Because each man his obliged to impart to others as he has received from God, John Gower has, therefore, concerning those things with which God has perceptibly endowed the account of his stewardship, while time hastens on, and desiring to elevate in some respect, composed between labours and leisure for the attention of others three books for the sake of doctrine, in the following form.)

That so vigorous an endorsement of the writer's own literary career is a sign of urbanity, not vulgarity, in the secular literary communities of late fourteenth-century Westminster and London is clear from how carefully Chaucer praises (in English verse) his own literary accomplishments in the mouth of the Man of Law

Pegasus, 1998), pp. 237–56. The drift of later copies of the *Confessio* away from the dominance of the Latin apparatus is discussed by Emmerson, 'Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture', pp. 176–79.

<sup>26</sup> Coleman, 'Lay Readers', pp. 219–25.

<sup>27</sup> *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, Early English Text Society, o.s., 81–82, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1900–01), II, 479. Citations are from this edition; translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

(and condemns Gower for his use of incest stories), as also in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and again in the Retraction to the *Canterbury Tales*, the last a kind of English colophon surveying the writer's career. Since the habit of listing works written is rare among medieval English poets, we may imagine that Chaucer's doing so was somehow prompted by Gower's use of Latin prose to accomplish this. At any rate, we may assume that Gower's Latin prose framing of his great English poem was more noticeable to medieval readers used to paying close attention to Latin gestures of authority than it has been to later readers, who often assume the solitary dominance of materials in English.

Yet apart from these large gestures and minor additional details or features noted above, Gower can hardly be said to occupy the role of a glossator gloriously. His dullness goes further than mere utility demands; it is a dogged dullness. Most of the glosses simply summarize as densely, impersonally, and passively as conceivable the narrative that they gloss. Some define their 'sins' of love, but in an administrative Latin that, next to the English text and the other Latin verses, yields far less meaning than the labour to construe its compressed clauses might seem to merit. As glossing goes, his is an exceedingly straight-faced *reductio*. Perhaps consequently, it possesses almost no visible capacity to elicit further responses in the form of further glosses by others. Although Gower at times altered his own glosses in coordinating them to his revision of the poem (as in the Prologue and Epilogue when redating and rededicating his poem), no copies show readers taking the hint to add more Latin glosses, beyond the minimal nota and a few longer remarks in English.<sup>28</sup> This is in clear distinction to the usual energetic tradition of medieval glossing, where one glossator adds to another — a tradition as visible in medieval literary presentations like those of the *Alexandreis* or the *Fables* of Walter of England as in the 'ordinary gloss' of the Bible or canon and civil law, which had standard marginal and interlinear glosses by the twelfth century but which continued to receive further glosses and commentary. Copies of the Bible often display 'two columns of commentary interspersed with, and virtually engulfing, the text of the Scripture in large letters',<sup>29</sup> sometimes further

<sup>28</sup> See Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', pp. 96–97.

<sup>29</sup> Mary A. Rouse and Richard H. Rouse, 'Statim invenire: Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page', in *Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 191–219 (p. 199). See also Beryl Smalley, 'The Bible in the Medieval Schools', in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, II: *The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. by G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 204–19; Raphael Loewe, 'The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate', *ibid.*,

nested within later writings such as Nicholas of Lyre's *postillae*; presentations of the 'ordinary' glosses on canon and civil law were similar, retained in printed copies through the seventeenth century, often further annotated by readers.<sup>30</sup> Against most medieval texts that were glossed, the failure of other glossators to add to Gower's glosses is a notable silence, an indication that something unusual has been achieved: at once formidable and uninviting, authoritative but dumbfounding, glosses that others were not encouraged to imitate, extend, or gloss further.

With their reductive starkness, and passive constructions, Gower's glosses indeed make a general if monotonous point about the limitations of quasi-clerical authority and quasi-omniscience in this quasi-confessional poem. Most of Gower's glosses are in the passive voice, or (like most of those in Chaucer manuscripts too) use 'hic declarat' or simply 'de'. The passive voice flattens the action in the same ways that the terse substance of the glosses flattens the ethical issues, removing the sense both of grammatical and of individual human agency. Gower's English verse presents the living agents of the stories; his prose Latin glosses offer static academic or administrative summaries of 'things done'. The Latin prose glosses are densely and omnisciently efficient, lacking action, tone, and agency; this is perhaps why they seem so unlike the English poetry that they gloss, in purpose and effect. The prose glosses indeed seem at times to militate against the moral points and general flavour of the English poem, whose point is secular ethics and whose worldly agency and spoken vitality is indicated by the poem's 'commun vois', which ultimately brings readers to a hope not for other-worldly salvation, but to a hope for 'mechil grace' to fall 'Unto the Citees' of the realm (VIII.3046–47).<sup>31</sup>

146–47; M. T. Gibson, 'The Place of the *Glossa ordinaria* in Medieval Exegesis', in *Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and their Medieval Readers*, ed. by Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 5–27.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Ullmann, *Law and Politics in the Middle Ages: An Introduction to the Sources of Medieval Political Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 88, 100–02, 177, 180; James Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 58–60.

<sup>31</sup> See generally Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). The broad terms of this outlook among the 'Ricardian' poets are established by Anne Middleton's 'The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II', *Speculum*, 53 (1978), 94–114. For Gower's specifically 'urban' ethics, see A. Galloway, 'Chaucer's Quarrel with Gower, and the Origins of Bourgeois Didacticism in Fourteenth-Century London Poetry', in *Calliope's Classroom: Didactic Poetry from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. by Annette Harder, Geritt Reinink, and Alasdair MacDonald (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 245–68.

Perhaps, indeed, the role of Gower's glosses should be reconceived, seen not as the later elucidations of meaning but as the initial, stark guidelines of meaning that the nearby English verses fill out, and elaborate, as if the English poetry was the gloss. The first gloss of Book I, at line 9, 'amor [...] a quo non solum humanum genus, sed etiam cuncta animancia naturaliter subiciuntur' (love [...] by which not only the human species, but also all living things are made subject), supports seeing as fully calculated the ambiguity in the Latin verses opening that book: 'Naturatus amor nature legibus orbem | Subdit, et vnanimes concitat esse feras' (Love fashioned for nature's ends subjects the world to the laws of nature, and incites wild ones to harmony [or: incites harmonized ones to wildness]).<sup>32</sup> In turn, this is explained, as if at a further remove and elaboration, by the nearby English, 'for yet was nevere such covine, | That couthe ordeine a medicine | To thing which god in lawe of kinde | Hath set' (I.29–33).

The possibility that the Latin glosses offer not only the plot outlines but also the dull seeds of the key images that develop vibrantly and with great significance in the English poetry deserves to be explored more comprehensively — especially when the English verse opens into a form of secular ethics rather than the theological doctrine from whose world the Latin glosses seem to derive. Thus in the story of Mundus and Paulina, where a good wife is tricked into sexual relations with a duke who comes disguised as a god, the story is presented as an example of 'hypocrisy': 'Hic tractat Confessor cum Amante super illa presertim Ipocrisia, que sub amoris facie fraudulenter latitando mulieres ipsius ficticiis credulas sepissime decipit innocentes' (by I.672; here the Confessor discourses with the Lover particularly about that Hypocrisy that, fraudulently hiding under a face of love, very often deceives innocent, credulous women with his fictions). While the metaphor 'sub amoris facie' (under the face of love) is the blandest cliché, this image of the illusory or deluded face becomes the centre of a many-sided exploration of hypocrisy in English poem. This begins by developing the image of religious hypocrisy of a stereotypical hypocritical priest: 'With *mea culpa*, which he seith, | Upon his brest fullofte he leith | His hond, and cast upward his yhe, | As thogh he Cristes face syhe' (I.661–64). This is then doubled by the hypocritical face of a hypocritical lover,

<sup>32</sup> On the ambiguity of these two Latin lines, and their position in the history of Boethian ideas of love and in the development of love in the rest of the poem, see Winthrop Wetherbee, 'Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer, and the Boethian Tradition', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. by R. F. Yeager, ELS Monograph Series, 51 (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1991), pp. 7–35.

Whan his visage is so desteigned,  
 With yhe upcast on hire he siketh,  
 And many a contenance he piketh,  
 To bringen hire in to believe  
 Of thing which that he wolde achieve,  
 Wheroft he berth the pale hewe;

(1.696–701)

The story develops this image of the hypocrite's face as the centre of Paulina's education in the complex motives in and limitation of an adoring gaze. First she is told by the corrupt priests that Anubus the god will come to her at night, and look at her 'With such a tokne of holinesse, | As thogh thei syhen a godesse' (1.873–74); she is allowed to imagine the pleasures of a worshipfully adoring gaze. Seeing the man whom she takes to be Anubus, she looks at him with a face of real if misguided devotion, 'As thogh sche verrailiche syhe | God Anubus' (1.904–05). Finally, after their sexual encounter, she meets the Duke on the street (1.939) and at last sees the truth in his face even while he claims that he is the god's 'lieutenant' and should be sexually worshipped in place of the god. She herself, however, has finally learned to keep her face hypocritically worshipful while seeing a lie, and to show her true face only when she is alone:

Sche herde his tale and bar it stille,  
 And hom sche wente, as it befell,  
 Into hir chambre, and ther sche fell  
 Upon hire bedd to wepe and crie,  
 And seide: 'O derke ypocrisie,  
 Thurgh whos dissimlacion  
 Of fals ymaganacion  
 I am thus wickedly deceived!  
 But that I have it aperceived  
 I thonke unto the goddes alle [...]'  
 And thus wepende sche compleigneth,  
 Hire faire face and al desteigneth  
 With wofull teres of hire ye,  
 So that upon this agonie  
 Hire housebonde is inne come

(1.952–69)

After her husband, ultimately and climactically seeing the truth of things in her face, rouses the Emperor and the citizens to take vengeance on the priests and the

Duke, the Emperor's council enacts a vigorous destruction of the hypocritical clergy and its corrupt institutions and idols. The 'ymages' they destroy are presented as if they were so many false faces: 'The temple of thilke horrible dede | Thei thoghten purge, and thilke ymage [...] Thei drowen out and als so faste | Fer into Tibre thei it caste' (I.1038–42). The citizens take pity on the love-besotted duke, exiling rather than executing him, reinforcing a secular sphere of judgement, whereby the Emperor's council forgives Mundus for the very sin that the Latin gloss has emphasized. Not only this forgiveness, but also all the individual, lay agency of the people and Paulina that it displays, stands in stylistic and ideological contrast to the passive forms of the grammar in the Latin gloss describing these events: 'idem dux in exilium, presbiteri in mortem ob sui criminis enormitatem dampnati extiterant, ymagoque dee Ysis a templo euulsa vniuerso conclamante populo in flumen Tiberiadis proiecta mergebatur' (at I.763; wherefore the same duke was condemned to exile, and the priests to death on account of the enormity of their crime, while the image of the goddess, pulled from the temple with universal approval by the people, was thrown into the Tiber river and sunk).

We might even speculate that Gower's Latin glosses, if not deliberately added to suggest the reductiveness in such clerical glosses of secular, human agency, were composed first, forming the uninspiring elements of what then sprang forth in vivid and unpredictable English poetry. Certainly that is the effect achieved if the glosses are *read* first. Something like this case for such a reversed sequence in Latin gloss and English verse has been made for the Latin quotations in *Piers Plowman*.<sup>33</sup> In a broader sense it might be indicated also in some of Chaucer's most famous literary creations, the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath: there, the Latin phrases serving as proof-texts have been entirely absorbed into the vernacular poetic production by characters who seem to 'gloss' and transform those by their very beings. H. M. Leicester, Jr, for instance, shrewdly notes that the Pardoner creates his tale and himself in conscious assimilation to the Latin text he quotes, 'radix malorum est cupiditas' (1 Tim. 6. 10); this reverses the assumptions about agency and intention made by modern 'exegetical' scholarship:

What exegetical criticism detects in the tale and makes an external doctrinal structure that contains and explains a Pardoner unaware of it is in fact the Pardoner's interpretation of himself, consciously undertaken and offered by him to the pilgrims. The Pardoner is the first exegetical critic of his own tale [...]. The Pardoner's conduct of his tale indicates that

<sup>33</sup> John A. Alford, 'The Role of the Quotations in *Piers Plowman*', *Speculum*, 52 (1977), 80–99.

among the things he knows about himself and is concerned to make others see are the things Robert P. Miller knows about him: that he is the *eunuchus non dei*, the embodiment of the *vetus homo*, the Old Man whose body is the body of this death and who is guilty of sinning against the Holy Ghost.<sup>34</sup>

This presumes that the Pardoner's embodiment of *cupiditas*, riven as it is by self-consciousness, is not therefore simply identical to what the Latin theologians would mean by the word, but cannot be wholly independent from them: his identity, his very body, are a gloss, and a very active and creatively transforming one, of the Latin text as well as of the clerical tradition that sustained that.<sup>35</sup> So too, the Wife of Bath's identity, as Anne Kernan much earlier suggested, is based on a similarly creative reimagining and transformation of the Latin notion of *cupiditas*. The Wife's 'gloss' on the Latin texts describing *cupiditas* generates a kind of psychological portrait rather than a theological point, Kernan notes, 'by which it is possible to make use of the psychological framework which St. Augustine and others developed to analyze the nature, causes, and effects of sin without implying a rigid moral judgment, to treat, for example, *invidia* or *acedia* as a personality disorder, a neurosis, if you will'.<sup>36</sup> By this argument, the English poetic expansion of the Wife's 'character' thus serves as a powerfully transforming gloss itself on just a few key, unstated Latin texts, while continuing to denounce the function of 'glossing' that her own textual identity has so thoroughly displaced. Even in the case of *Piers Plowman*, one may see the Latin framework not as a sign of how subservient the English of that poem is to the fuller context of the Latin, but instead as an extraordinary instance of English poetry transforming and gloriously glossing what the Latin undergirding presents. The more deeply the Latin has been engulfed by the English text, the more the English poem itself attains the status of a gloss, with all the liberty that status allows to explicate in very different terms the tradition of Latin, clerical traditions.

This relation suggests a pivotal and momentous shift in English poetry's authority and possibilities. These features and authority would not, however, be

<sup>34</sup> H. M. Leicester, Jr, *The Disenchanted Self: Representing the Subject in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 38–39.

<sup>35</sup> For a polemical insistence on the dependence of this character's elements on the medieval theological tradition, including the features that modern critics tend to see in psychoanalytic terms, see Lee Patterson, 'Chaucer's Pardoner on the Couch: Psyche and Clio in Medieval Literary Studies', in *Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in the 'Canterbury Tales'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 67–96, 200–17.

<sup>36</sup> Anne Kernan, 'The Archwife and the Eunuch', *ELH*, 41 (1974), 1–25 (p. 10).

predicated on vernacularity as such, and it would be an error to ignore the Latin subtexts or frameworks. Nor should English be seen as somehow making a claim to be 'foundational'. Rather, the literary authority of English poetry would be defined as a form of glossing, with all the subordination yet freedom and vitality that this implies, 'taking the spoils back from Egypt' and 'domesticating the captive woman' (Deut. 21. 10–13), to use the language of the proof-texts for medieval allegorical Christian reinterpretation of pagan literature.<sup>37</sup> This perspective shows that English poetry in its most important period of new horizons possesses no sudden break in ontological status and intrinsic authority, but instead exploits a powerful new capacity to carry out the most recuperative and transformative abilities of 'glossing', whose 'spoils' now would be a generally humanist and secular ethics within a broadly Christian, although no longer clerically theological frame.

The broad development of secular and vernacular literary authority in this direction was not, however, intrinsically inevitable, except insofar as nonclerical intellectuals began to dominate the writing of literary works. The Latin commentary tradition on which this freedom would be based is extraordinarily rich in ideas, and it remained so in many discursive contexts until the Reformation and even beyond. Some sense of the unfulfilled potential of actual Latin glosses for English poetry, and of a different balance between spheres of vitality that might have been struck, may be gained by looking at the glossed copies of the *Prick of Conscience*. These suggest a possible future fundamentally different from where Gower's and other later Middle English poets' developments of English poetry and its relation to Latin glosses actually took things. They help reveal the path that was taken in English poetry by way of the path that was not.

One copy of the *Prick of Conscience*, for instance, Bodleian, MS Digby 14, probably copied some time early in the reign of Henry VI, i.e., 1423–34 (as the final list of kings on a further page indicates), presents a long Latin colophon that links the virtuous, authentic, and edifying life among virtuous and edifying companions to reading and teaching the *Prick of Conscience*, in contrast to less edifying companions and literature. More strikingly, the colophon speaks in the voice of the scribe or even the author of the *Prick of Conscience*, defining 'my' intention in copying or even creating the poem ('qui hunc compilavi vel scripsi'), on what authority in the latter case is unclear (see Appendix A, below).

<sup>37</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, I: *The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. by Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 211–24.

We can dismiss as uncharacteristically inattentive Lewis's and McIntosh's summary of this colophon simply as 'passages from Isidore' (although it may be significant that even the best scholars of the copies of the English poem ignore its Latin glosses).<sup>38</sup> At least, we may see this as a remarkable display of enthusiasm for a work that is there considered 'tibi conscientie stimulus et anime cibus' (a goad for your conscience and food for your soul). At most, it is possible that we have transmitted, uniquely here, words by the author of the *Prick of Conscience*. In either case, we may call that colophon passionate literary criticism of an applied and distinctly medieval kind, suggesting some elements of the massive popularity of this work, a phenomenon that seems to puzzle most modern critics who mention it. Here, scribal or authorial labour, readerly uses, and intrinsic value are all woven together, and together define the poem's value. Next to this, Gower's gesture of self-endorsement in his colophon to the *Confessio Amantis* seems less original and extraordinary in posture; it too is a muted version of a more vibrant Latin tradition.

The more fully glossed copies — like the popularity of the work itself — of the *Prick of Conscience* point to its power to provoke fascination in its contemporary readers and users, and to solicit adding glosses to glosses. 'Ffor wha-swa wil it here or rede, | I hope he sal be stirred þar-by', the poem says near the end (9600–01); the glosses here and elsewhere, whether pious effusions or learned elaborations, are an indication of the kinds of 'stirring' this provoked. Another copy of the *Prick of Conscience*, indeed, attains a level quite beyond Gower's or indeed any glossator's efforts to provide a useful Latin gloss for an English poem. The copy, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS IV 998, is fully glossed, from edge to edge and cover to cover — even where it is framing the poem's claim to offer its wisdom in English, 'To lewed men of Englelond | þat conneþ noȝt Latyn vnderstonde' (ll. 338–39; see Fig. 1).

The Brussels manuscript presents layered glosses in Latin, in two hands. The first layer appears most clearly at the outset, then grows more spare after Book IV; the second fills in all available space from the beginning, inserting markers where the passage must jump from one available space in the page to another. This layering vividly conveys the sense of one glossing action leading to another, showing the possibilities of this poem's attraction to Latin-speaking clerical users, at least as they respond to previous clerical users, as well as the poem's obvious utility and interest for those who do not know Latin (whose needs the poem itself claims at beginning and end to address).

<sup>38</sup> Lewis and McIntosh, *Descriptive Guide*, p. 96.

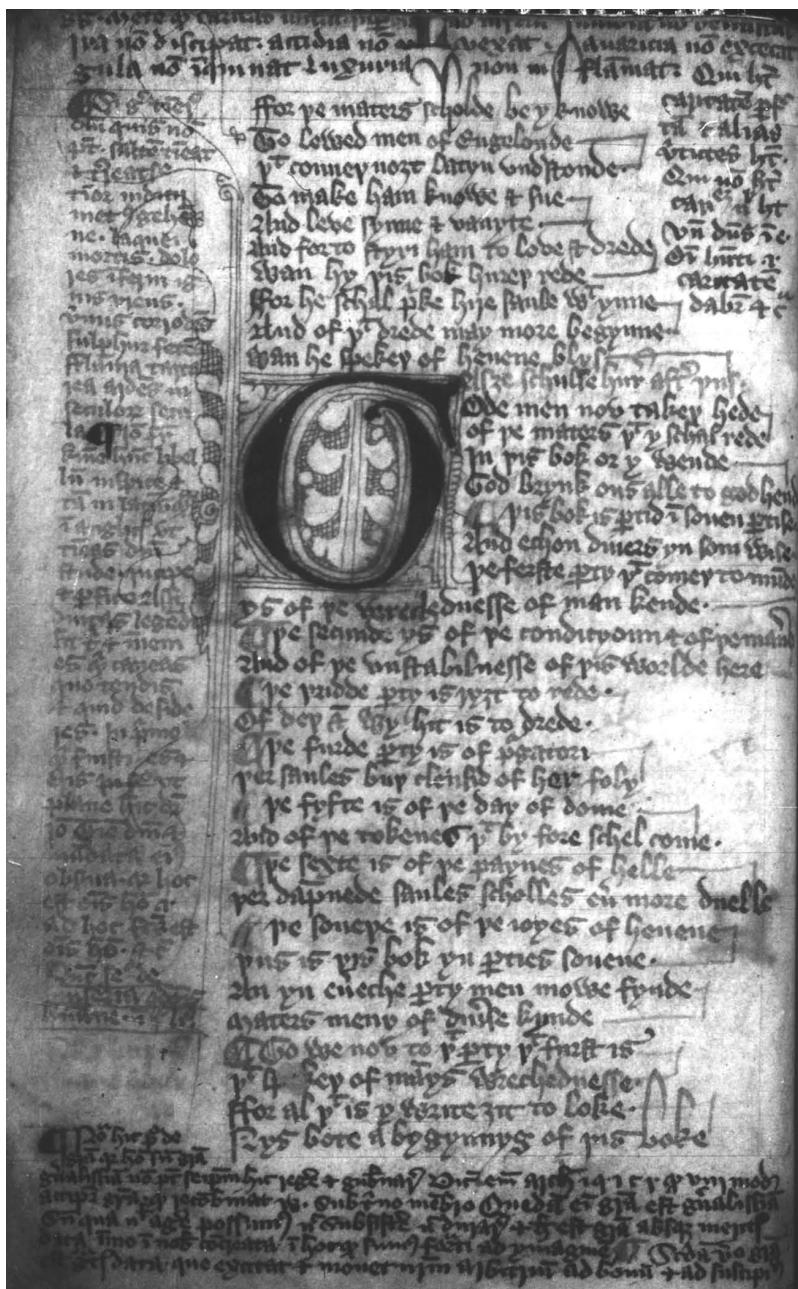


Fig. 1. *Prick of Conscience*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS IV 998, fol. 5<sup>v</sup>, c. 1400. Reproduced with permission of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique.

Some of the Latin glosses in the Brussels copy supply, and quote, further materials from Latin authorities mentioned in the English poem. Thus, the English text, describing the virtue of a confessant knowing 'hym silf kyndely' since that way he will be led 'To þynke of meknesse and of drede', goes on to quote from St Bernard four things that prevent such self-knowledge of mortality and transience of worldly pride:

Of þis seyt Bernard bereþ wytnesse  
 Als yn þis verse ywryten ysse  
*Forma, favor populi, feruor iuvenilis, opes*  
*S[urripuere tibi noscere quid sit homo].<sup>39</sup>*  
 (ll. 221–48; fol. 4)

The gloss here presents a long (now nearly illegible) set of points 'de humilitate', which is 'custos [...] virtutum' (the guardian of virtues), at the close of which discourse St Bernard is cited and quoted again, 'Nota hic secundum Bernardum xii gradus humilitatum', proceeding to summarize the twelve steps of humility from Bernard's treatise by that name (fol. 4<sup>v</sup>).

As this suggests, the Brussels manuscript's Latin glosses are often independent from the English poem while following the same topic, offering different but related materials. Thus the English poem, describing how 'hard' the final parts of life are, presents a ancillary discussion and detailed of how one can tell if an old and a young man will survive a serious illness; an old man will die if, for instance, 'þe lefte eghe of hym þan semes les, | And narrower þe right eghe es' (818–19). If a young man 'ay wakes, and may nocht slepe', he is similarly in his last illness (825). These details, useful for a priest to have in mind when considering whether to administer the Viaticum, are glossed with a long presentation of the 'Signa mortis' (fol. 11; signs of death). This includes nothing so homely, or directly useful, as the English poem's advice on symptoms indicating a terminal prognosis, but instead presents a list of the 'abominaciones huius seculi' (horrors of this world), especially those brought on by age, including the transformation of once supple limbs into 'membra tamquam ligna et lapida' (fol. 11<sup>v</sup>; limbs like sticks and stones). The practical information in the English verse is assumed; the Latin adds a fuller reflection on it, perhaps even the basis for a sermon.

Often, as in this instance, the Latin is terse but, drawing on other sources, can achieve a kind of elegance, even exceeding that of the English poem's best

<sup>39</sup> The rubricated Latin line is incomplete but full space has been left for it; I supply from the text of Galba presented by Morris.

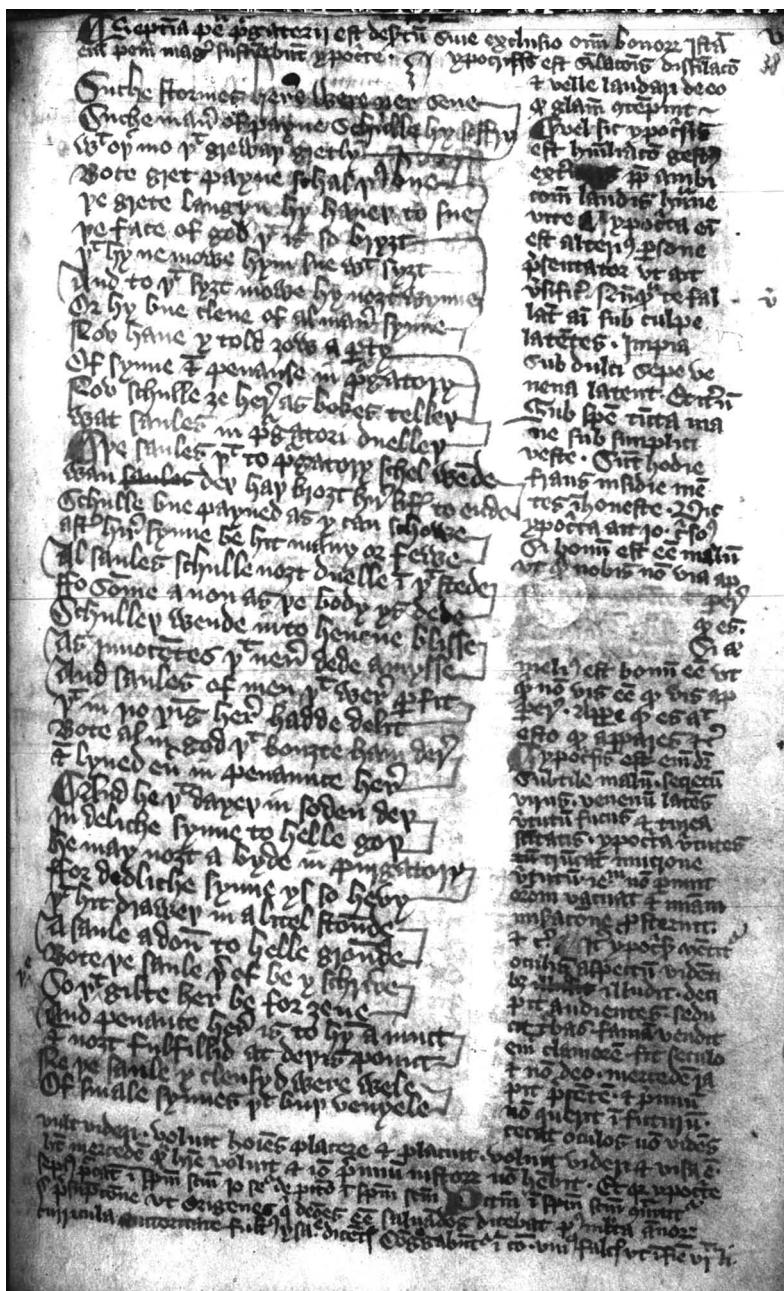


Fig. 2. *Prick of Conscience*, Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS IV 998, fol. 38<sup>r</sup>, c. 1400. Reproduced with permission of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique.

rhetorical effects. Thus the English text in the Brussels copy, describing the changes that decay brings to a dead man's face, says 'Panne mowe men oure lekenesse yse | How hit changeþ as hit hadde neuer be'. Sadly, the eloquence of the second line, evoking a sense of universal transience, seems derived from an error of eye-skip; the second line in the manuscript printed by Morris, BL, MS Cotton Galba E IX, shows the likelier authorial original: 'Chaunged, als it had never bene he' (833). The duller Galba reading is more prosaically accurate for the sense, defining how the 'likeness' of this person changes, not how it changes as if the person had never existed. The Latin gloss in the Brussels manuscript, however, perhaps responds to the eloquent 'as hit hadde neuer be' of its English text, in the same lofty register of universal transience, achieving something equally eloquent in its own way: 'Considera ergo gloria mundi quali fine clauditur, et fuge vanitates eius et transitorias voluptates' (fol. 11<sup>v</sup>; consider, therefore, the glory of the world, how it is concluded with such an end; and flee its vanities and its transient pleasures). The broad topic that the gloss here presents is indeed available on a large scale later in the English *Prick of Conscience* (ll. 1095–1199), but one appreciates the pithiness of the Latin here all the more for that.

Predictably, the Brussels Latin prose gloss avoids all the repetitive excesses of the English poem's typical ventures into 'high style', most displayed by the long series of opposites that show this world's 'unstablenes': 'Now es laghter and now es gretyng; | Now er men wele, now er men wa' — a series of oppositions that goes on relentlessly for twenty lines (1450–70; fol. 18); there, the Latin gloss has a varied stretch of comments on transience by various authorities. The Latin is never as intellectually repetitive as the English sometimes is, but full of detail and complexity, opening further the topic that the English verse presents.

An example treated in detail shows this best, and can also suggest the differences between the world of actual confession that this Latin-glossed English work inhabits from that of quasi-confession that Gower's glossed English poem helps define. The description of purgatory in the *Prick of Conscience* elicits a rich yield of considerations about fine degrees of sin and possible absolution, framed within the question of the various pains of purgatory on which the English text focuses (see Fig. 2):<sup>40</sup>

Pe souede Payne to saules is þis  
In purgatori as wildernesse  
Per faut is of al maner þing

<sup>40</sup> Quotations of MS IV 998 are presented by gracious permission of the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. For a description, see Lewis and McIntosh, *Descriptive Guide*, pp. 36–37.

þat sholde bue to manys lekyng  
 Hire Payne is torned þer meny fold  
 As nou in hete and now in cold  
 Som tyme hy schulleþ be ypyned longe  
 Wiþ hete and þanne cold amonge  
 Hi schulleþ haue þer hete, honger and þerst  
 And gret travayle wiþoute rest  
 Hi buþ ybete to eche hire paynes  
 Wiþ stormes wiþ wyndes and wiþ raynes  
 Oþerwyle wiþ hawel swyrt and kene  
 Suche stormes here were nevere sene  
 Suche maner of Payne schulle hy soffre  
 Wiþ ofer mo þat grewaþ gretly  
 Bote gret Payne schal þus bue  
 Pe grete langur hy haveþ to sue  
 Pe face of god þat is so bryȝt  
 þat hy ne mowe hym sue wit syȝt  
 And to þat syȝt mowe hy noȝt wynne  
 Or hy bue clene of al maner synne  
 Nou haue y told ȝow a party  
 Of synne and penanse in purgatory  
 Nou schulle ȝe here as bokes telleþ  
 Wat saules in purgatori duelleþ

(fol. 37v–38r; Morris 3246–75)

The gloss, which has been describing the ‘pains of purgatory’ for several leaves, elaborates both that and the degrees of sin, as is appropriate to a confessional and penitential tradition and institutional world (see Appendix B, below). Like Gower’s story of Mundus and Paulina, much of the section here concerns the sin of hypocrisy. But rather than merely noting sources, the gloss here adds its own compilation of learned quotations, many drawn from commentaries on Matthew 6. 2 (‘Cum ergo facies eleemosynam, noli tuba canere tanti, sicut hypocritae faciunt in synagogis et in vicis, ut honorificentur ab hominibus’; therefore, when thou dost an almsdeed, soun not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honoured by men).

Why the gloss should focus on hypocrisy here is not immediately clear. Perhaps the seventh pain of purgatory, being deprived of all good, evokes the state of hollowness characteristic of hypocrisy. More likely, the topic of hypocrisy ‘when thou dost an almsdeed’ is directed to those who pay a priest to pray for a departed

loved one, in accord with the view that purgatory may be shortened ‘through byhyng of paynes þat greves, | With almus, þat men to the pure gyves’ (*Prick of Conscience*, 3608–09). This raises certain spiritual risks for those seeking to help their departed loved ones, as well as for the priests accepting such money. This connection is supported by other kinds of evidence. A small gloss in another copy of the *Prick of Conscience*, Bodleian, MS e musaeo 76, next to the lines just quoted that describe how giving alms can help souls in purgatory, presents, in a neat fifteenth-century textus hand, ‘Purgatorium ijed Ricardus Fitzstyvan’. Perhaps this is a reminder to the priestly owner of this copy of the *Prick* about a soul for whom he had been commissioned twopence to offer regular prayers, to help him pass more quickly through purgatory (fol. 45). If so, the amount is paltry by contemporary standards. Describing the kinds of deals struck with priests to offer regular prayers, the early fifteenth-century author of the generally reformist dialogue *Dives and Pauper* has Pauper say that a layman may ask, “What is it worth to syng so many messys?” and þe prest answe, “Twenty schillyngis” or “Ten schillyngis” or ellys “A noble” [...] & þus barganyyn & brockyn aboutyn syngynge of þe messe, þat may nouȝt ben sold ne bout, as men don aboutyn byyng & sellynge of an hors or of a cow & of a calf, & so þei fallyn boþin in cursyd symonye”.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, the focus in the Brussels manuscript on hypocrisy rather than simony in this connection may result from seeing the spiritual risk as falling most on the living layman who makes a donation to help a departed loved one, and thus risks hypocrisy, rather than on the priest who carries it out and thus risks simony.

Whatever its impetus, under the topic of ‘hypocrisy’ the gloss in the Brussels copy goes on to pursue a sin that may not have a place in purgatory at all, since it may be unredeemable: ‘sin in the holy spirit’. The topic is one that Chaucer’s Pardoner alludes to as ‘synne horrible’ (VI.377–88), yet he coyly refuses to define just what this might be, leaving the whole point of his warning a self-aggrandizing display of his ability to frighten ‘the lewed peple’. The Brussels glossator of the *Prick of Conscience* offers clearer guidance on the topic of irredeemable sin. Moreover, rather than using the issue to emphasize the terror of sin and his own and the church’s fearsome punitive powers, he adds at the end of this discussion the condemned opinion of universal salvation, even the devil, supposedly held by Origen. This follows directly on the topic of sin that cannot be redeemed, and it is perhaps an important view in relation to this point in the poem. For if hell is really a kind of longer purgatory, then even demons and the devil might simply be

<sup>41</sup> *Dives and Pauper*, ed. by Priscilla Heath Barnum, Early English Text Society, o.s., 275, 280, 323, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976–2004), I, pt II (1980), 186.

considered there, in an eventually recuperable status, along with sinners of no matter how 'horrible' a sin. Equally pertinent is the glossator's reference to the end of the English poem, which shows a close sense of the work on which he is commenting. He refers to Book VI of the English *Prick of Conscience*, which describes the pains of hell, and which itself closes with the claim that 'alle þe þat wille þair syn forsake [...] In þa payns of helle sall never com' (7510–17), a statement that, taken absolutely, might imply something like the idea of universal salvation, at least in the terms that the idea attributed to Origen suggests. This reference in the gloss to a later part of the English poem shows a careful reading of its contents, even, it seems, hyper-careful, a closer consideration of its theological implications than the English poet seems likely to have intended.

The pastiche of the commentary in this one small instance is not, thus, original in most of its details, but it seems so in its assembly and in its application to the poem. It defines a broad range of interests about just how this sin of hypocrisy is deficient, how it may be combated, whether it may be repented and ultimately absolved. The category of hypocrisy is approached here as a difficult one to locate, in purgatory or hell; in terms of damnation, the category of hypocrisy is liminal just as purgatory itself is liminal. One detail that may be original is a minor but shrewd transformation of pseudo-Chrysostom's text. The received text of that work reads 'si bonum est, esse bonum, ut quid non vis esse, quod vis apparere? Si vero malum est, esse malum, ut quid vis esse, quod non vis apparere?' (if it is good to be good, why do you not wish to be what you seem? And if it is bad to be bad, why do you wish to be what you do not seem to be?); but the gloss in the Brussels copy of the *Prick of Conscience* reads 'si bonum est esse malum, vt quod nobis non vi[s] apparere quod es? Si autem melius est bonum esse, vt quod non vis esse quod vis apparere?' (if it is good to be bad, why do you not wish to appear to be what you are? But if it is better to be good, why do you not wish to be what you appear to be?). The change makes Chrysostom far more ironic and acute: if it is good to be evil, why bother dissimulating? But if one dissimulates as if one were good, this shows that it is better to be good. Therefore, one should try to be as well as seem good. This logic is clearer in the gloss's quotation than in the received text, and at a minimum it shows the ability to convey if not to create a shrewder version.<sup>42</sup>

If Gower's glosses present a flattened version of the English text, the Latin glossing of the *Prick of Conscience* is, at least overtly, considerably richer and more complexly dimensioned than the English poem it glosses. But it is somewhat unfair to the *Prick of Conscience* to put it this way, just as it is unfair to Gower's

<sup>42</sup> For the sources here, see the notes to Appendix B, below.

*Confessio* to see his glosses there as ingloriously dull. In both cases, gloss and text have to be read together within a larger context of literary and social meaning and function. The glosses in the *Prick of Conscience* manuscripts are vital intellectual materials because the English text of that poem touches on matters where the Latin and English doctrinal materials have a living context and tradition, the confessional world. This generates the glosses in the manuscripts of that poem, as it generates the *Prick of Conscience* itself and its enormous popularity. This living, socially interactive context makes the glosses productive of other glosses for the same reason: an audience that energetically uses it and needs it, with all the complexity that they can find in it and explicate from it for themselves and others. The *Prick of Conscience* glosses are extensions of the cultural energy that the poem itself was part of, in sifting sin, punishment, and penance — an energy that, for better or worse, most of us can now barely comprehend.

By the same token, however, Gower's manuscript glosses, with their deadening and timeless quality, are equally hard for us to weigh properly without further context. Their point is clear only in its further highlighting of the vividness and action of the English poetry, and in terms of a subtle rejection of the clerically controlled confessional world. He addressed, at least potentially, a readership able to appreciate the irony of dull Latin glosses to rich English stories, just as the copyists and readers of the *Prick of Conscience* addressed an audience possibly able to appreciate the enrichment of vital Latin glosses on moral theology. Gower's glosses at best emphasize by contrast the English poetry's display of individual and civic self-determination, and its psychological complexities of sin that no priest can take up and absolve, for which a secular writer is needed to impose the terms of civic and secular soul-searching and ethical ideals.

In the long run, we owe our nearly exclusive focus on the poetry of Gower and his 'Ricardian' associates rather than on the *Prick of Conscience* and its communities of readers and audiences to the continued flourishing of secular poetry after Chaucer, and ultimately to the social, intellectual, and institutional changes of the Reformation. For at that date or soon after, the dialogic guidance and public structure of auricular confession, along with its supporting literature in Latin and English, evaporated, leaving visible little more than a residue of invective and parody, while secular English poetry increasingly claimed to itself the liberating powers and authority to debate and interpret that had prospered through the tradition of the Latin gloss. What remained of the overt gloss on English poetry and other narrative became as often as not a sign of an unreliable or partisan reader, like the unpredictable assertions of 'E.K.' or the warring glosses in the succession of English Bibles that replaced the medieval Latin Bible with its 'ordinary

gloss'. Gower's inglorious glosses show why the Latin tradition of glosses made no serious inroads into English manuscripts, and even how that tradition was swallowed within and further expressed through the forms and powers of English literature. In contrast, the glossed copies of the *Prick of Conscience* show how the voices at the centres and the margins of medieval literary and intellectual culture might have continued a different kind of confessional dialogue.

## Appendix A

### Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 14,<sup>43</sup> fols 159<sup>r-v</sup>

Hec dicit ysidorus: 'Diligite veritatem quia ihesu veritas est', vnde dicit, 'Ego sum via, veritas et vita'.<sup>44</sup> Dilige consortium bonorum; bonis te coniuge; bonorum consorcia appete. Bonorum consilia require. Sancte individue adherere; si fueris socius conuersacionis eius, eris et virtutis. Qui cum sapientibus graditur sapiens est, qui cum stultis stultus est. Simile enim simili coniungi solet;<sup>45</sup> famam tibi nutris si indignis te sociaveris. Periculorum est vitam cum malis ducere; perniciosum est cum hiis qui prave societas sunt sociare. Melius est habere malorum hodum quam consorcium. Sicut multa bona habet communis vita sanctorum, sic plurima mala affert societas malorum,<sup>46</sup> qui enim tetigerit inmundum coinquinabitur. Spera in deo et fac bonitatem et pasceris in divitiis eius. Quicumcui hic boni agis, spera habere remunerationem<sup>47</sup> in eternam vitam. Ideo quicumcui largiaris, cum hillaritate largire; prebe misericordiam sine munere, prebe elemosinam sine tedio. De tuis iustis laboribus ministra. Non auferas alterius unum; alii tribuas; nec misericordiam ostendas alieno spolio. Nichil studeas propter laudem, nichil propter temporalem opinionem, nichil propter famam, sed propter vitam eternam. Quicumcui agis, pro futura age mercede; eterne remunerationis expectatio te teneat amplius. Si enim hic laus queritur, illuc remuneratio amittitur. Iusti enim non hic sed in futuro recipient. Futura merces non presens promittitur iustis. In celo non in terra merces speratur sanctis.

Ecce fratre karissime, acceperisti monita; data est tibi vivendi norma. Hic liber est tibi conscientie stimulus et anime cibus;<sup>48</sup> nulla te iam ignorancia a peccato excludit ignara. Legem quem debebas sequi, disposui; qualis debebas esse, docui. Cognitionem mandatorum

<sup>43</sup> Quoted by permission of the Bodleian Library. For a description, see Lewis and McIntosh, *Descriptive Guide*, p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> John 14. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Compare 'simile appetit simile', etc., Hans Walther, *Proverbia sententiaeque latinitatis medii aevi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprech, 1967), nos 29639b-d, 29641.

<sup>46</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 15. 33, 'corrumpunt mores bonos conloquia mala'.

<sup>47</sup> MS: *?remuersatione*.

<sup>48</sup> See John 4. 34.

habes. Iam scis quid sit recte vivere; vide ne ultra offendas. Vide ne deinceps homini quod nosti despicias. Vide quod legendo respicis, vivendo non contempnas. Donum scientie acceperet retine; imple opere quod didicisti perceptione.

In super humiliter te deposco, fratre karissime qui hunc tractatum<sup>49</sup> legis vel audis, ora pro me qui hunc compilavi vel scripsi, ut percipere merear veniam peccatorum, cum christicolis omnibus ad gaudia pervenire celorum, ubi cum deo patri et spiritu sancto regnat dominus noster ihesus christus dei filius benedictus, in cuius nomine flectatur omne genu celestium, terestrium et infernorum,<sup>50</sup> cui est honor et gloria, virtus et magnificencia, potestas regnum et imperium per infinita seculorum secula. Amen.

(Isidore says these things: 'Love truth because Jesus is truth', whence he says, 'I am the way, the truth, and life'. Love the company of the good; unite yourself with the good; desire associations with the good. Seek the counsels of the good. Cleave to the holy individual; if you are a companion in his dealings, you too will be a person of virtue. Who walks with the wise is wise, who walks with the foolish is foolish. Like is prone to join to like. Guard your reputation if you associate with the unworthy. It is dangerous to live with the evil, and pernicious to associate with those who are depraved associates. It is better to have the hatred of the evil than their companionship. Just as the common life of the holy has many good things, so the company of the evil brings many bad ones, for whoever touches evil is made evil along with them. Hope in God, and do good, and you will each at his feast. Whenever you do good for someone, hope to have your reward in eternal life. Therefore to whomever you are generous, be generous joyously; offer mercy without reward, offer alms without disgust. Be solicitous of your own just labours. Take nothing of anyone's; give to another; do not show mercy with ill-gotten spoils. Do not be zealous on account of praise, or on account of worldly opinion, or on account of fame, but on account of eternal life. To whomever you act, act for future reward; let expectation of eternal reward hold you more firmly. For if you seek praise here, reward there will be lost. The just will receive not here but in the future. Future not present reward is promised to the just. Let reward for the holy be expected in heaven, not on earth.

Behold, beloved brother, take these admonitions; a norm of living is given to you. This book is a prick of conscience to you, and food for the soul; thus no ignorance excludes you from unknowing sin. The law that you ought to follow, I have set forth; how you ought to be, I have taught. Keep your knowledge of the commandments. Now you know what it is to live justly; see that you offend no more. See that, moreover, you do not look down on the man you know. See that what you pay heed to while reading, you do not condemn by living. Retain the gift of the knowledge you have received; fulfil the work that you have learned by your attention.

Moreover, I beg you humbly, dearest brother who read or hear this treatise, pray for me who have compiled or written it, that I might be worthy to obtain remission of sins, to arrive at the joys of heaven with all the worshippers of Christ, where our lord Jesus Christ

<sup>49</sup> MS: *-tum* only partly legible.

<sup>50</sup> Phil. 2. 10.

the blessed son of God reigns with God the father and the Holy Spirit, in whose name every knee of things heavenly, terrestrial, and infernal is bent, to whom is honour and glory, force and magnificence, power, kingdom, and empire through unending ages of the ages. Amen.)

## Appendix B

### Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, MS IV 998, fol. 38<sup>r</sup> (see Fig. 2)

Septima pena purgatorii est desertum siue exclusio omnium bonorum. Istam enim penam magis sustinebunt ypocrite. Ypocrisis est simulationis dissimulatio et velle laudari de eo quod gloriam contempnit. Vel sic ypocrisis est humiliationis gestus exterius propter ambitionem laudis humane vite. Ypocrita enim est alterius persone presentator, vt ait versificator: 'Numquam te fallant animi sub culpe latentes',<sup>51</sup> 'Impia sub dulci sepe venena latent'.<sup>52</sup> Et iterum, 'Sub specie tincta macie, sub simplici veste | Sunt hodie fraus, insidie, mentes inhoneste'.<sup>53</sup> 'Dic ypocrita', ait Johannes Chrysostomus, 'si bonum est esse malum, vt quod nobis non vi[s] apparere quod es? Si autem melius est bonum esse, vt quod non vis esse quod vis apparere? Appare quod est at esto quod appares'.<sup>54</sup> Iterum, 'Ypocrisis est enim dicitur subtile malum, secretum virus, venenum latens, virtutum fucus, et tinea sanctitatis. Ypocrita virtutes truncat mucrone virtutum; iejunium non perimit, oracionem vacuat, et misericordiam miseratione prosternit', etc.<sup>55</sup> Iterum ypocrisis mentitur oculis,

<sup>51</sup> Compare Walther 19307, 'Numquam te fallant animi sub vulpe latentes', based on Horace, *Ars Poetica*, line 437, 'numquam te fallent animi sub vulpe latentes'. The reading 'culpe' for 'vulpe' may be a scribal slip but produces a meaningful explication of the original.

<sup>52</sup> Compare Ovid, *Amores* 1.8.104, 'Impia sub dulci melle uenena latent'.

<sup>53</sup> Walther, no. 30563.

<sup>54</sup> Compare [pseudo-]Johannes Chrysostomus, *Opus imperfectum in Mathaeum*, homily 45, 'Diceto mihi, o hypocrita, si bonum est, esse bonum, ut quid non vis esse, quod vis apparere? Si vero malum est, esse malum, ut quid vis esse, quod non vis apparere? Nam quod turpe est apparere, turpius est esse: quod autem formosum est apparere, formosius est esse. Ergo auto esto quod appares, qut apparere quod es' (the Latin text is available only in *Patrologiae cursus completus [...] Series Graeca*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols (Paris: Migne, 1857–66), LXV, col. 885).

<sup>55</sup> Compare Petrus Chrysologus, *Sermones*, Sermo VII, 'De hypocrisi et eleemosyna, in illud Matthaei VI': 'Cum jejunatis, nolite fieri sicut hypocrytae tristes': 'Hypocrisis subtile malum, secretum virus, venenum latens, virtutum fucus, tinea sanctitatis. Adversa omnia nituntur viribus suis, armis suis pugnant, impugnant palam: unde et cavitur tam facile quam videntur. Hypocrisis secura simulat, fallit prospera, curiosa mentitur, et crudeli arte virtutes truncat mucrone virtutum: jejunium jejunio perimit, oratione orationem evacuat, misericordiam miseratione prosternit. Hypocrisis cognata febri frigido poculo propinat ardorem. Quod corporibus est hydrops, hypocrisis

<fallit> aspectum, videntibus illudit, decipit audientes, seducit turbas, famam vendit, emit clamorem, fit seculo, et non deo, mercedem rapit presentem, et premium non querit in futurum, cecat oculos, non videns vult videri, voluit homines placere et placuit; voluit videri et visa est. Habet mercedem quam habere voluit et ideo premium iustorum non habebit.<sup>56</sup> Et quia hypocrite sepius peccat in spiritum sanctum,<sup>57</sup> ratione reus de peccato in spiritum sanctum. Peccatum in spiritum sanctum contravenitur, sed presumptione, ut Origenes qui demones esse saluandos dicebat post multa annorum curricula, auctoritate fultus Ysaie dicentis 'Congregabuntur in congregationem unius fascis',<sup>58</sup> ut in fine vi<sup>ti</sup> libri.<sup>59</sup>

animabus, hoc est: hydrops bibendo sitit, hypocrisis inebriata sitit. *Exterminant enim facies suas, ut videantur hominibus jejunantes.* Hypocrisis dum cupid captivare oculos, oculis fit ipsa captiva' (*Patrologiae cursus completus [...] Series Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, 1844–64), LII, col. 205).

<sup>56</sup> Compare Petrus Chrysologus, *Sermones*, Sermo IX, 'In illud Matthaei': 'Attendite, ne justitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus': 'Frates, hic praeceptio coelestis vult jactantiam tollere, auferre pompam, vanitatem demere, submovere inanem gloriam: sic justitiam vult celare. Justitia, quae per se sibi abundat ad gloriam, spectaculum populi, vulgi laudes, favores hominum, mundi gloriam non requirit: a Deo genita, coelum spectat; in oculis agit divinis; supernis virtutibus mixta semper a Deo solo, ut glorificetur, exspectat. Sed haec est justitia, quae ex Deo est; illa vero justitia quae est hypocrisis, justitia non est: mentitur oculis, fallit aspectum, videntibus illudit, decipit audientes, seducit turbas, trahit populos, famam vendit, emit clamorem, fit saeculo, Deo non fit, mercedem rapit praesentem, praemium non quaerit in futuro, caecat oculos, caeca ipsa non videns vult videri: propter quam caecitatem Christus praesenti sic inchoat in praecepto. *Attendite.* Hoc est, ne gestiatis attendi. *Ne justitiam vestram faciatis coram hominibus.* Quare? *Ne videamini ab eis.* Et si visi fueritis, quid? *Mercedem non habetis apud patrem vestrum, qui in coelis est.* Frates, hic Dominus non judicat, sed exponit, pandit cogitationum dolos, secreta mentium nudat, injuste justitiam tractantibus, modum justae retributionis indicit. Justitia, quae se humanis oculis locat, divini patris non potest exspectare mercedem: voluit videri, et visa est; voluit hominibus placere, et placuit; habet mercedem quam voluit; praemium quod habere noluit, non habebit' (*Patrologiae Latina*, LII, col. 212).

<sup>57</sup> That is, knowingly, callously, and impenitently. See Augustine, *Expositio inchoata Epistolae ad Romanos* (*Patrologiae Latina*, XXXV, col. 2087): 'Illud sane magna intentione animi considerandum, et totis viribus pietatis amplectendum satis appetet, quoniam si gratia et pax ad implendam Trinitatis commemorationem sic ab Apostolo ponitur, ac si Spiritum sanctum nominasset; ille peccat in Spiritum sanctum, qui desperans, vel irridens atque contemnens praedicationem gratiae per quam peccata diluuntur, et pacis per quam reconciliamur Deo, detrectat agere poenitentiam de peccatis suis, et in eorum impia atque mortifera quadam suavitate perdurandum sibi esse decernit, et in finem usque perdurat'.

<sup>58</sup> Isaiah 24. 22.

<sup>59</sup> On the common belief by Western Latin theologians that Origen had taken this position, see de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, p. 179. Yet, as de Lubac points out, this view rests on a single, elusive remark in Origen's actual writings.

(The seventh pain of purgatory is the desert, or the exclusion of all good things. This pain is most experienced by the hypocrite. Hypocrisy is the dissimulation of appearance, and a will to be praised in so far as the hypocrite seems to contemn glory. Or thus: hypocrisy is the external gesture of humility, on account of ambition for praise of human life. For the hypocrite is a presenter of another persona, as the versifier says, 'Never let intentions hiding sins deceive you'. 'Impiousness often lies hidden under pleasant things'. And again, 'in modern days under the thinly painted veneer, under the simple clothing, are fraud, treachery, and dishonest souls'. 'Say, hypocrite', asked John Chrysostom, 'if it is good to be evil, why then do you not want to appear as you are? But if it is better to be good, why do you not want to be what you appear? Let you appear as it is, and be what you appear'. Again, 'hypocrisy is called a subtle evil, a secret illness, a hidden poison, a darkening of virtue, and a maggot of sanctity. The hypocrite cuts off virtues with the sword of virtues; he annihilates fasting, offers vain prayer, and lays low mercy with his misery', etc. Again, the hypocrite lies to the eyes, tricks the appearance, deludes those looking, deceives listeners, seduces crowds, sells his fame, procures attention, is made for the world and not for God, seizes present reward and does not seek future reward, blinds the eyes, while not seeing wishes to be seen, wants to please men and has pleased them, has wanted to be seen and is seen. He has the reward that he wants to have, and therefore he will not have the reward of the just. And since a hypocrite often sins against the Holy Ghost, justly he is guilty of sin against the Holy Ghost. [The idea of] sin against the Holy Ghost is objected to presumptuously by Origen, as when he said that demons would be saved after many cycles of years, supported by the authority of Isaiah's saying, 'And they shall be gathered together as in the gathering of one bundle [into the pit. And they shall be shut up there in prison: and after many days they shall be visited]', as at the end of the sixth book.)<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> See *Prick of Conscience*, vi.7510–17: 'alle þase þat wille þair syn forsake [...] In þa payns of helle sall never com'.

## WOMEN READERS AND PIERPONT MORGAN MS M. 126

Martha Driver

A womman is the mannes bote,  
His lif, his deth, his wo, his wel.

—John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VII.1912–13

In an article published in 1998 in *Re-visioning Gower*, edited by Robert F. Yeager, I briefly suggested that Morgan MS M. 126 was made for an aristocratic female patron, very possibly Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV.<sup>1</sup> Close analysis of the illustration in this de luxe manuscript, along with the scribal notation, seems to support this observation. The coat of arms of England appears in one miniature, and the scribe, who is usually identified as Ricardus Franciscus, has supplied twenty-one inscriptions in the ascenders and descenders of MS M. 126 that refer to the Virgin Mary, the King, 'La Belle' (a probable allusion to Elizabeth), and also finally to himself. The manuscript further provides good evidence to dispute the observation made by A. S. G. Edwards some years ago that in the *Confessio Amantis* Gower's 'women seem to be presented as lacking in intrinsic interest, and to be of significance primarily as aspects of male-focused narratives'.<sup>2</sup> This is certainly not the case with their visual representation in MS M. 126, which argues for active female engagement. In example after example, women are shown as central characters in the action (as well as being the main speakers in many of Gower's texts). The majority of illuminations in MS M. 126 emphasize female agency and intelligence, qualities that still appeal to women readers of Gower's

<sup>1</sup> Martha Driver, 'Printing the *Confessio Amantis*: Caxton's Edition in Context', *Re-visioning Gower: New Essays*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998), pp. 269–303.

<sup>2</sup> A. S. G. Edwards, 'Gower's Women in the *Confessio*', *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993 for 1990), 224.

instructive tales. After providing a brief overview of illustration in extant manuscripts of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which tends to be minimal (with the exception of the one other fully developed picture cycle to be found in Oxford, New College (NC), MS 266), the essay will turn to a description of pictures in MS M. 126, specifically examining several of the many illustrations of women that appear in this manuscript.

### *Brief Overview of Illustration in Gower Manuscripts*

As has been pointed out elsewhere, there are usually only two illustrations in *Confessio* manuscripts: scenes of the Lover kneeling before the Confessor and of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of Precious Metals.<sup>3</sup> The Taylor and Rosenbach manuscripts of the *Confessio* also, however, include author portraits of John Gower.<sup>4</sup> The two earliest *Confessio* manuscripts held in New York City collections are Columbia University Library, MS Plimpton 265, which has been dated by Kathleen Scott to between 1400 and 1415, and Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M. 690, made c. 1390 to 1400 according to both Scott and the Morgan catalogue, though it is dated elsewhere to the first quarter of the fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Both manuscripts have only one miniature, Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of Precious Metals, showing the figure of a man with a head of gold and a body of silver standing in a landscape.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Griffiths, 'Confessio Amantis: The Poem and Its Pictures', in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 163–77; Derek Pearsall, 'The Gower Tradition', *ibid.*, pp. 183–84; Peter C. Braeger, 'The Illustrations in New College MS. 266 for Gower's Conversion Tales', in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 275–76; Patricia Eberle, 'Miniatures as Evidence of Reading in a Manuscript of the *Confessio Amantis* (Pierpont Morgan MS M. 126)', *ibid.*, pp. 325–26; Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490: A Survey of MSS Illuminated in the British Isles*, 2 vols (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), II, no. 120, 322–23; Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 86–90.

<sup>4</sup> Princeton University, Robert H. Taylor Collection, MS 5, and Philadelphia, Rosenbach Foundation, MS 1083/29. See Griffiths, 'Confessio Amantis', pp. 163, 177.

<sup>5</sup> CORSAIR, the updated catalogue of the Pierpont Morgan Library, which includes the original Morgan files (formerly to be read only onsite), is available online at <<http://corsair.morganlibrary.org>>. Illustrations in MS M. 126 may be viewed on CORSAIR. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, pp. 323–24. Pearsall, 'Manuscripts and Illustrations', p. 75.

Gower uses the Nebuchadnezzar story from the Book of Daniel (2. 32–33) in his Prologue to announce the theme of ‘division’, and the King’s dream predicts the ruin of divided kingdoms. Derek Pearsall has pointed out that this is ‘in many respects an idiosyncratic choice of illustration and most probably reflects Gower’s own priorities and his desire to insist, through the illustration, upon the general theme of his Prologue’.<sup>6</sup> Scott has suggested that the miniature in Morgan MS M. 690 may be by an artist she calls Hand A, who also contributed to the de luxe Carmelite missal in the British Library (Add. 29704–05/Add. 44892), illustrated c. 1398. According to Scott, this artist was ‘apparently one of the early Continental artists to introduce to English book illustration a sense of realism through his painterly modelling of human figures and his depiction of their environment’. Margaret Rickert has placed the same artist at Gelders, identifying several miniatures in his hand and commenting that the pigments he uses ‘are painter’s colours’, among them, ‘pure ultramarine of excellent quality; rich vermilion; soft lake pink shaded with lake or madder red; dull yellow shaded lightly with vermilion; and very dull, dark green’. About the Morgan miniature Scott says, ‘the only figure in the scene (a statue) is not easily comparable, but the marine-blue plants and ground, the background design and the border style suggest at least a common shop or training.’<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pearsall, ‘Manuscripts and Illustrations’, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 28. Margaret Rickert, *The Reconstructed Carmelite Missal: An English Manuscript of the Late XIV Century in the British Museum (Additional 29704–5, 44892)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), pp. 82–86. Morgan M. 690 further includes seven illuminated borders, the style of which Scott has said to be similar to the border in the Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library (Bodleian), MS English Poetry a. 1). Consisting of 204 leaves, Morgan M. 690 has been written in two columns, as is typical, of forty-two lines, rather more brief than the norm for *Confessio* MSS. The scribe has omitted bits of text and then reinserted it on stubs. There are ten nota (or *signes de renvoi*) in the scribe’s hand, indicating insertions with the formula ‘Turne to the sexten leef afore this signe’, with a variety of signs following that are then repeated in the main text. The *signe de renvoi* might indicate that the scribe or his exemplar was copying from an unfinished or possibly ongoing text of the poem. On the second flyleaf of the manuscript, we find this note: ‘this M.S. copy of the *Confessio Amantis* by John Gower was found at Ravensworth Castle in a very dirty rotten condition and was repaired and rebound in the year 1861 [...]. Cura nostra et sumptibus/Ravensworth.’ This note was presumably written by Henry Thomas, first Earl of Ravensworth. Of the hand, the Morgan catalogue says only ‘English cursive’. Morgan M. 690 also includes some drawings of scrolls around catchwords, one scroll adorned with a face and another with a profile head. There are pencil drawings as well, probably dating from the seventeenth century, of the head of a man and of a man in profile. The Morgan catalogue explains that these are intended as portraits of John Gower.

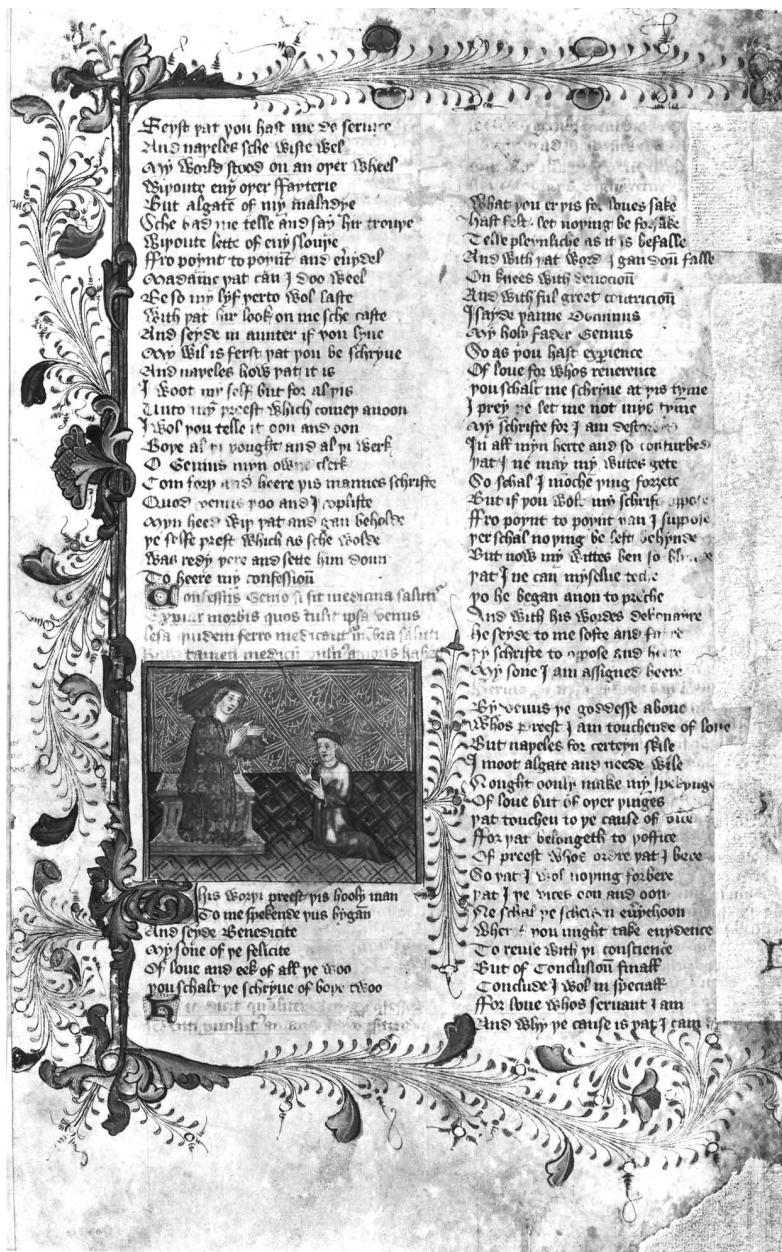


Fig. 3. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Lover Confesses to Genius', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 125, fol. 3<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

The Dream miniature in MS Plimpton 265 is iconographically similar, in fact nearly identical to that in M. 690, though apparently much rubbed. In the border of folio 4 of this manuscript, Scott has noted 'black flowers in sprigs of miniature frames', which she calls a stylistic rarity in English decoration. Plimpton 265 has been written in two columns of forty-five lines in 171 leaves. It is most important for its having been copied by Scribe D, the hand of Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.3.2 identified by Doyle and Parkes in their well-known essay 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century'.<sup>8</sup>

A scribal hand closely resembling that of Scribe D (perhaps someone in his circle) has also copied Morgan M. 125, produced in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Morgan MS M. 125 consists of 180 leaves in two columns of forty-six lines. The layout matches exactly the description by Parkes and Doyle of the fifteen early manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*, 'written forty-six lines to a column and two columns to a page'. In a footnote to their famous essay, we learn that 'it is reasonable to suppose that this layout may have derived ultimately from the author's own copies. However, the inclusion of the Latin prose commentary within the columns of some of these copies and variations in the size of the spaces occupied by the miniatures disturb page-for-page parallels throughout'.<sup>10</sup>

Morgan M. 125, like the other manuscripts under discussion, has only one miniature, but this time the scene is of the Lover confessing to Genius (Fig. 3), the

<sup>8</sup> A. I. Doyle and M. B. Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. by M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London: Scolar, 1978), p. 177.

<sup>9</sup> Doyle and Parkes do not include M. 125 on the list of manuscripts copied by scribe D. The hand of Morgan M. 125, however, is very close to that of Scribe D, as confirmed by both A. I. Doyle and Linne R. Mooney after examining black-and-white photographs of the manuscript (July 2003). In subsequent correspondence, Doyle pointed out that Jeremy Griffiths had connected the hand of M. 125 with that of Glasgow Hunterian 7 of the *Confessio*, commenting further that '[i]t or they are certainly excellent hands of the same school as TCC R.3.2 'D' (letter, 26 August 2005). Mooney remarked that the hands of M. 125 and Glasgow Hunterian 7 are 'closer to D than to Delta', but that the scribe of M. 125 'shares many features with D' (e-mail, 7 October 2005). Capitals in M. 125 are formed with fine decorative lines in the centre bars, and dotted 'y' is consistent. Both Doyle and Mooney pointed to slight differences from the hand of Scribe D in M. 125: 'more pronounced loops on medial minuscule d' (Doyle) and 'more formal[ity], with more otiose strokes, more care over formation of each letter than the most cursive samples so far identified as by scribe D' (Mooney).

<sup>10</sup> Doyle and Parkes, 'The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales*', p. 165 n. 6.

other standard illustration in *Confessio Amantis* manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> Like the illustration of the Dream of Precious Metals, this picture is said to have derived from Gower's original: 'The two illustrations that regularly appear in manuscripts of the *Confessio*, portraying Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the Lover confessing to Genius, surely derive from Gower's instruction.'<sup>12</sup>

One of two extant manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis* with a fully developed picture cycle is NC, MS 266, which once had thirty-two miniatures, of which nineteen remain. There is, for example, now a space in MS 266 on folio 23 where the miniature of the Dream of Precious Metals has been cut out. The miniatures in MS 266 occur primarily within the Middle English text, not between the Latin caption and the Middle English text as they do in MS M. 126. The pictures in MS 266 are English in style and have been associated with the workshop of William Abell. These miniatures are quite different even iconographically from those that appear in MS M. 126. Peter C. Braeger has remarked: 'In style and in subject matter the pictures in New College MS. 266 contrast sharply with those of the other heavily-illustrated *Confessio* manuscript, Morgan M. 126.'<sup>13</sup> NC, MS 266 does illustrate some of the same subjects that appear in MS M. 126, however, but the scenes (along with the text) are simplified in the Oxford manuscript and contain fewer figures, or different narrative elements have been selected for illustration.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Both Plimpton 265 and Morgan M. 125 are missing portions of preliminary text. Griffiths suggests in a note that there may originally have been two miniatures in the Plimpton MS: 'The Precious Metals miniature appears on fol. 1<sup>v</sup>; following on fol. 3 a portion of text from Prol. 984–[Book] I 343 is missing, which could have contained a Confessor miniature in the same position as that in [the related] MS Bodley 294' (*Confessio Amantis*, p. 170 n. 21). Morgan M. 125 may also have lost a miniature on one of its beginning leaves.

<sup>12</sup> Pearsall, 'Gower Tradition', p. 183. See also Pearsall, 'Manuscripts and Illustrations', p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> Braeger, 'The Illustrations in New College MS. 266', pp. 297–98 n. 3. For the Abell attribution, see J. J. G. Alexander, 'William Abell 'lymnour' and 15th Century English Illumination', *Kunsthistorische Forschungen Otto Pächt zu seinem 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Artur Rosenauer and Gerold Weber (Vienna: Residenz, 1972), p. 168. Pearsall comments that '[t]he pictures in this MS are undistinguished, and the association, often reported, with the workshop of William Abell seems unlikely' ('Manuscripts and Illustrations', p. 89 n. 32).

<sup>14</sup> Richard K. Emmerson, 'Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture: Latin and English in Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 143–86, comments that the Oxford manuscript has been 'designed for private reading rather than public performance', and further, that 'it treats the *Confessio* primarily as an English collection of love stories to be read privately' (p. 179).

MS M. 126 is a large vellum folio that presents the first recension of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* written in Latin and Middle English. While there has been some debate about the number of illuminations in the manuscript, M. 126 is generally said to have 106 miniatures.<sup>15</sup> The number of miniatures in MS M. 126 is actually variable, depending on whether one counts each of the astrological signs as separate pictures as well as each of the fifteen miniatures of stars with accompanying gems. CORSAIR, the Morgan's online catalogue, says there are '79 miniatures with figures and scenes illustrating the text, 12 small oblong miniatures illustrating the zodiac, and 15 small oblong landscape miniatures illustrating the stars'. The old Morgan catalogue somewhat confusedly explains: 'The book originally contained 108 [miniatures] of which 9 were cut out c. 1771 but replaced when it came into Mr Morgan's possession.'<sup>16</sup> There are still, however, two (or possibly three) miniatures missing from MS M. 126. The picture space has been cut out on folios 48<sup>v</sup> and 171<sup>v</sup>. There is, in addition, a leaf torn out between folios 72 and 73.

The artists of MS M. 126, vaguely identified as 'Anglo-Flemish' in the Morgan Library catalogue, have produced vivid, if crudely rendered, miniatures. It is a commonplace that 'crude' style of illustration in manuscripts is synonymous with English origin, but in this case, I would argue for a Flemish artist or artists from observation of costume and figural representation. Kathleen Scott speculates that there are two illustrators at work, the first 'trained in the southern Low Countries (Flanders)', the second artist characterized by slightly different rendering of human figures ('thinner faces, paler complexions, and long noses') who supplies background scenes of interiors that do 'not follow the formula used by Illustrator A'.<sup>17</sup> Patricia Eberle comments further that 'the miniatures display a degree of faithfulness to the tales they illustrate which could only have been achieved on the basis of a reading of the text, either by the painter, or, more likely, by someone

<sup>15</sup> This number accords with that counted by Kathleen L. Scott, who has divided the pictures in her catalogue into column and smaller-column miniatures (II, no. 120, 322–23). A more complete description of each image in the manuscript is provided in *An Index of Images in English Manuscripts from the Time of Chaucer to Henry VIII c. 1380–c. 1509*, ed. by Martha Driver and Michael Orr, gen. ed. Kathleen Scott, Fascicle IV (London: Harvey Miller, 2007). Eberle, 'Miniatures as Evidence of Reading', says there are 110 miniatures, a number that is certainly incorrect. Pearsall, 'Gower Tradition', says there are 108 (p. 184 n. 19), also incorrect, though emended in his essay 'Manuscripts and Illustrations' to accord with Scott's count (p. 89).

<sup>16</sup> CORSAIR catalogue, <<http://corsair.morganlibrary.org>> [accessed 12 October 2005].

<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, pp. 323–24.

who devised the program of miniatures as a whole'.<sup>18</sup> Close analysis of their iconography suggests that the artists or designer of the pictorial programme was selecting, highlighting, and elaborating upon specific story elements in Gower's text, perhaps with an eye to pleasing a female patron. The pictures in MS M. 126 are often linked to the Latin prologues and glosses that in this manuscript customarily precede the English text, but they also directly illustrate the content of the English text, further suggesting a literate reader with some fluency in Latin.<sup>19</sup>

### *Miniatures of Women in MS M. 126*

Of the seventy-nine column miniatures, which are mainly narrative scenes, there are sixty-five pictures of women, who often seem to dominate the illustration. In some cases the women are shown as larger than the men they accompany. An early scene in the poem, in which the narrator (Gower) encounters the king and queen of love (Fig. 4), depicts Venus with flowing hair accompanied by a crowned, winged male figure (Cupid) standing slightly above her on a grassy mound. Cupid holds a sceptre and points a flaming arrow at the exposed heart of a gesturing man dressed in a houppelande and wearing a large conical hat, which cannot quite conceal the fact that Venus is larger than he is. The narrator laments his sufferings from love and calls upon Cupid and Venus:

And *with* that word y saw anoon  
 The kinge of loue and quene bothe  
 But he that king with eyen wrothe  
 His cher aweyward fro me caste  
 And forth he passed at the laste  
 But or he forth wente  
 A fiery dart me thought he sente  
 And threwe it thorugh myn herte rote.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Eberle, 'Miniatures as Evidence of Reading', pp. 316–17.

<sup>19</sup> Emmerson remarks, 'Although they introduce the following English tales, the miniatures usually illustrate the preceding Latin passages, suggesting they are to be studied in terms of the Latin' ('Reading Gower', p. 181). See also Emmerson, *ibid.*, p. 183. In MS M. 126 the illustrations reflect both the content of the Latin précis and that of the English verses.

<sup>20</sup> Transcribed from Morgan MS M. 126, fol. 8<sup>v</sup>. Compare *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, Early English Text Society, e.s., 81–82, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1900–01), I, 39, ll. 138–45.



Fig. 4. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Narrator Meets the King and Queen of Love', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 8v.  
Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

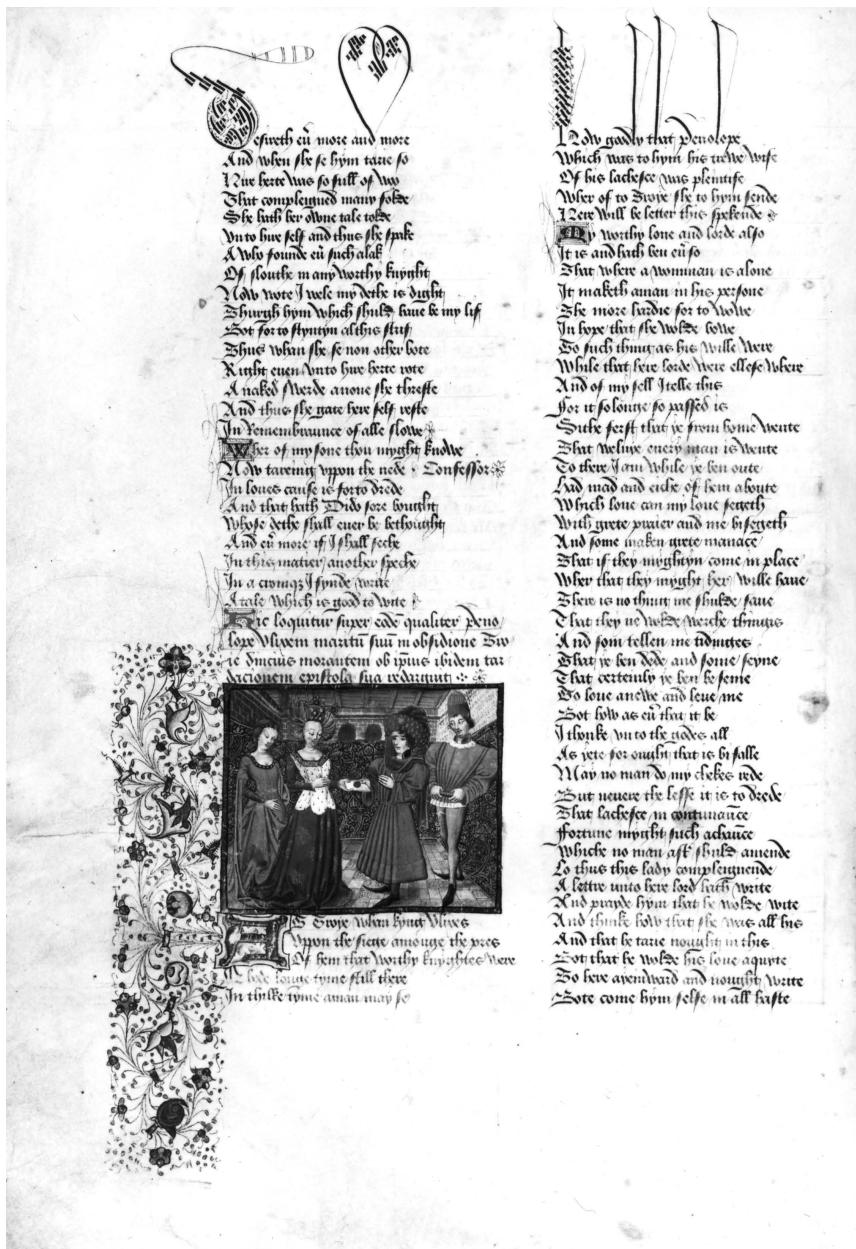


Fig. 5. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Penelope Sends a Letter to Ulysses', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 68v.  
Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

The Morgan text further describes Venus as 'socour and Welle Or wele of wo whether shal be tide', but omits the line 'Sche cast on me no goodly chiere'.<sup>21</sup> The miniature, however, shows Venus glaring rather pointedly at the narrator, her brows contracted and her hand raised in a speech gesture indicating that she is also instructing him.

Among several other women in MS M. 126 who are shown as physically larger than the men is Penelope (Fig. 5), who is handing the letter she has just written to Ulysses to a smaller male messenger. In Gower's version, Ulysses is deeply affected by his wife's news of her suitors and rushes right home: 'He made none delaient, But goeth hym hom in all hie, Where that he founde bifore his eye, His worthy wif in good astate.' The moral of this story (beyond the power of the pen wielded by a wife) is that sloth in love causes difficulties and should be avoided: 'And thus was sesed the debate, Ofloue and slouthe was excused, Which dothe grete harme where it is vsed, And hindreth many a cause honeste.'<sup>22</sup> In MS M. 126, Penelope is represented as active and literate, the central actor in the domestic drama.

Dido (Fig. 6) is shown also as a large female figure that dominates the illumination. Wearing a cap with a fine transparent veil and a dress edged and skirted with ermine, Dido points a sword at her breast. She is observed by three men in a single-masted ship and two (very small) men in a rowboat. In Gower's version of this story, Dido seems to expect the imminent return of her lover Aeneas, and when he dawdles, Dido, too, writes a letter and then thrusts a sword into her heart. When compared with earlier versions of this tale, the moral of Gower's story is again unusual, having to do with sloth in love rather than outright abandonment of women by callous lovers: 'Wher of my sone thou myght knowe, How tareing yppon the nede, In loues cause is forto drede, And that hath Dido sore bought, Whose dethe shall euer be bethought.'<sup>23</sup> Whether or not they suffer,

<sup>21</sup> Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 39, l. 152. The depiction of the narrator in the illustration may reflect the assertion in the Latin prologue, 'Non ego Sampsonis vires, non Hercules arma Vinco', and the netted heart refer to his being trapped in the nets of Venus, also mentioned in the Latin prologue. See Macauley, *ibid.*, I, 37–38.

<sup>22</sup> Transcribed from MS M. 126, fol. 69. Compare Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 307, ll. 225–33.

<sup>23</sup> Transcribed from MS M. 126, fol. 68<sup>v</sup>. The Latin prologue again outlines this action. See Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 303. Compare Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 304–05, ll. 138–42. For further analysis of the Dido story in the Middle Ages, see Marilynne Desmond, *Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality, and the Medieval Aeneid*, Medieval Cultures, 8 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), especially p. 162.



Fig. 6. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Suicide of Dido', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 68<sup>r</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

like Dido, the inattention of a 'slothful' lover (and Ulysses, for example, is much more prompt to return in Gower's tale than in classical versions of this story), the women in MS M. 126 are shown as heroic, powerful, and dominant over the smaller male figures in each scene.

In the Dido story, the letter penned by the heroine contributes to the (fictional) historical record. Other women who write letters in the *Confessio* include Canace, who takes up the pen in her own hand (the text specifies) to write to her brother. The miniature in MS M. 126 shows her plunging a dagger into her heart and writing on a scroll with her own blood. In another story, also illustrated in this manuscript, Phyllis writes a letter of complaint to Demophon, who has

abandoned her. These are literate ladies who (however unlucky in love) do not suffer passively but instead decisively take action by recording and communicating their grief, much as one might do when preparing a lawsuit against an abusive husband or lover, another sort of practical model of behaviour for a woman reader to observe.<sup>24</sup>

In Gower's version, the story of Medea, another classical figure who is not always viewed positively, also has a surprising moral. The English text is introduced in MS M. 126 by a rather alarming miniature in which Medea, shown with wings of peacock feathers, commands the picture frame. She holds the hands of two infants on a trestle stool with a cushion, piercing through both of their chests with her sword. Jason, wearing a tall fur hat and short belted jacket, belatedly begins to draw his sword from its scabbard as another woman looks on.<sup>25</sup>

Gower spends some two hundred lines describing Medea's enchantments, first to help Jason gain the Golden Fleece and then to transform Jason's father into a young man. Throughout the tale, Medea is consistently portrayed as active, arranging the exchange of marriage vows with Jason before a statue of Jupiter, for example, stealing her father's treasure, and running away with Jason. Her murder of the children is told in one line ('With that she bothe his sones slogh, Before his yghē') before Medea ascends to the court of Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom, with Jason 'left in grete distresse'.<sup>26</sup> Rather than condemning Medea for infanticide or making any negative comment about her at all, the moral of this story is not to make false promises to women: 'Thus miht thou se what sorwe it doth To swere an oth which is noght soth, In loves cause namely.'<sup>27</sup> Again, such sentiments might appeal particularly to women readers of Gower's story.

<sup>24</sup> Canace (fol. 51<sup>v</sup>) is shown with her child in a canopied bed, plunging the dagger into her breast and writing on a scroll in her blood as Aeolus, her father, with crown and sceptre, looks on. On fol. 72, Story of Phyllis; (L) Phyllis, wearing a crown, and Deinephontis, also crowned and wearing a short, fur-trimmed jerkin, are shown with a maid-servant, who is carrying Phyllis's train, and another woman and man; (R) Suicide of Phyllis, still crowned, hanging from a tree by a cloth around her neck. There are castles in the background.

<sup>25</sup> MS M. 126, fol. 108. The wings are an interesting addition. Gower's tale describes Medea's chariot drawn by dragons in great detail, but there is no mention of Medea's actually having wings, except metaphorically. Once she sees that Jason has successfully gained the Golden Fleece, the Morgan manuscript comments (fol. 111): 'If that she hadde wyngis two, She wolde haue flowe to him thoo, Straught ther he was in to the boote.'

<sup>26</sup> Transcribed from MS M. 126, fol. 113<sup>v</sup>. Compare Macaulay, *The English Works*, II, 61–62, ll. 4215–22.

<sup>27</sup> Macaulay, *The English Works*, II, 62, ll. 4223–25.



Fig. 7. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Pyramus and Thisbe', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 58v. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

In the *Confessio*, Gower refashions many well-known stories to create heroic women. Thisbe is the main protagonist in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, for example, and this is true as well in the stories of Ceix and Alceone and of Theseus and Ariadne, which are also illustrated in MS M. 126.<sup>28</sup> Thisbe's name is the first mentioned in Gower's story ('This faire maiden Tisbe highte, And he whom that he loued hote, Was Piramus be name hote'), and as the action unfolds, Thisbe is presented as the main speaker. Finding the body of Pyramus, Thisbe swoons and then is given a lengthy lament (ll. 1462–81) on the sorrows of love. The Morgan miniature (Fig. 7) shows the two lovers together, though in different stages of the story. The fashionably dressed Pyramus is represented as standing with a sword pointed at his breast, but Thisbe is given the more dramatic focus, shown at the moment of her death with blood on her breast. As she falls, her hand gesture indicates that she is speaking her lament even as she dies.<sup>29</sup>

In other tales, women are represented as intelligent and keen-witted, as in the story of the Three Questions, and as patient and wise, as exemplified by Constance. Even in a story like Jephtha's daughter, prefaced by a gruesome miniature in which the headless body of the daughter is shown kneeling before her father, the head still wearing its beautiful *balzo* in a pool of blood on the tiled floor, the daughter is not just a passive instrument of her father. She is portrayed sympathetically and given her own voice. Shown as both thoughtful and courageous, she first comforts her father for his misfortune in having to slay his child, then asks for forty days' respite to prepare herself by mourning her lost youth and her unborn children: 'So as she may with wordes glade, Comforteth hym and bad hym holde, The couenaunt which he is holde, Towardes god.'<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Compare the version of Pyramus and Thisbe later told by Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. by Earl Jeffrey Richard (New York: Persea, 1982), pp. 180–92. The miniatures in MS M. 126 include: fol. 58v, Pyramus and Thisbe: Pyramus is shown wearing a short belted jerkin with a fur collar and is about to pierce his breast with a sword as Thisbe, who wears a cap with a fine transparent veil, bleeds from her chest, raises her hand, and falls to the ground. In the background are a castle, trees, and two boats on water. The foot of Pyramus breaks the frame of the picture; fol. 84v, Ceix and Alceone: Alceone, shown as a woman in a red dress and white head wrap (or turban), bends over a man (Ceix) in the water, grasping his arm. There is a castle in the background; fol. 120, Theseus and Ariadne: Theseus, wearing a short belted jerkin, places his hand on the head of a dragon with a gold ball of thread in his mouth and holds the thread with his left hand. Ariadne wears a hennin and veil and a gown with an ermine collar and hem.

<sup>29</sup> Transcribed from MS M. 126, fol. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Transcribed from MS M. 126, fol. 76. In the story of the Three Questions, a knight must answer three questions within three weeks or lose his head and all his property. The knight

In the *Confessio*, women are also shown in the process of learning about themselves. The main focus in the miniature illustrating the story of Iphis and Araxarathen is on the woman hero, who too late learns to value her lover. Richly attired, Araxarathen is shown in the foreground of the picture, staring thoughtfully at the stone into which her hard heart will transform her; her lover, Iphis, in the background, hangs from a tree. In the tale, Araxarathen is portrayed sympathetically as a maiden of the lower class who retains her virtue against the romantic advances of the royal Iphis, who, unable to persuade the maiden to love him, commits suicide. Both lovers are later enshrined in the temple of Venus.<sup>31</sup>

Another cautionary tale that instructs women not to be haughty, or disdainful of their lovers, is the story of Rosiphelee (Fig. 8).<sup>32</sup> The hero, Rosiphelee, is described as 'a lusty mayde', a princess who is 'bothe wis and faire' but disinterested in love. One May morning before dawn, the princess rises to walk in her park, where she observes the spring flora and paired-off fauna, 'The buck, the do, the hert, the hinde, The male go with the femele', and suffers a silent 'querele

consults his fourteen-year-old daughter, Petronella, who is described in the text as 'of visage She was right fair and of stature Liche vnto a heuenly fygure And of manere and goodly speche' (fol. 27). In the miniature she is a large figure, larger than the figure of her father, and stands nearest the king. Miniatures from MS M. 126 are: fol. 26<sup>v</sup>, Petronella answers the three questions before Alfonso, King of Spain; the bearded king wears a fur collar with a cloak and is seated on a throne. The maiden is dressed in a low-cut gown with an ermine collar, edging, and side pieces and wears a *balzo* with a jewelled gold band. Her hand touches the thumb of her other open-palmed hand in a speech gesture. The scene also includes two men in ermine-lined jerkins, one wearing a conical fur hat and a sword, with another dressed in a houppelande and a conical hat; fol. 32<sup>v</sup>, Constance; (L) Constance onshore addresses three men on a gangplank leading to a single-masted ship with rigging and forecastle. Two men gesture in surprise, another prays; (R) Constance, in an ermine-lined gown and *balzo* with a jewelled gold band, prays in an open boat with two barrels; fol. 76, Jephtha's daughter: woman's head wearing *balzo* in pool of blood on tiled floor; (L) woman's headless body with hands clasped in prayer; (R) bearded man wearing boots and tunic with gold buttons, swinging large sword, with sword case suspended from his shoulder; altar with curtains, Crucifixion (Christ on cross, St John and Virgin on either side) drawn in gold on panel.

<sup>31</sup> Fol. 88, Iphis and Araxarathen: woman wearing *balzo* gazes at a rock, surrounded by crenellated ramparts; Iphis shown hung from a tree. There is a statue of an idol above holding a lance and shield. The image of the idol recurs in other miniatures in MS M. 126 (c.f., fol. 93, Vulcan chaining Venus and Mars) and seems to signal stories with pagan sources. For a general overview on idols, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Camille does not mention the incidence of pagan idols in MS M. 126, however.

<sup>32</sup> This is one of two miniatures in MS M. 126 that illustrates only women (the other, on fol. 156<sup>v</sup>, column B, illustrates Virgo as a young woman in a gown).

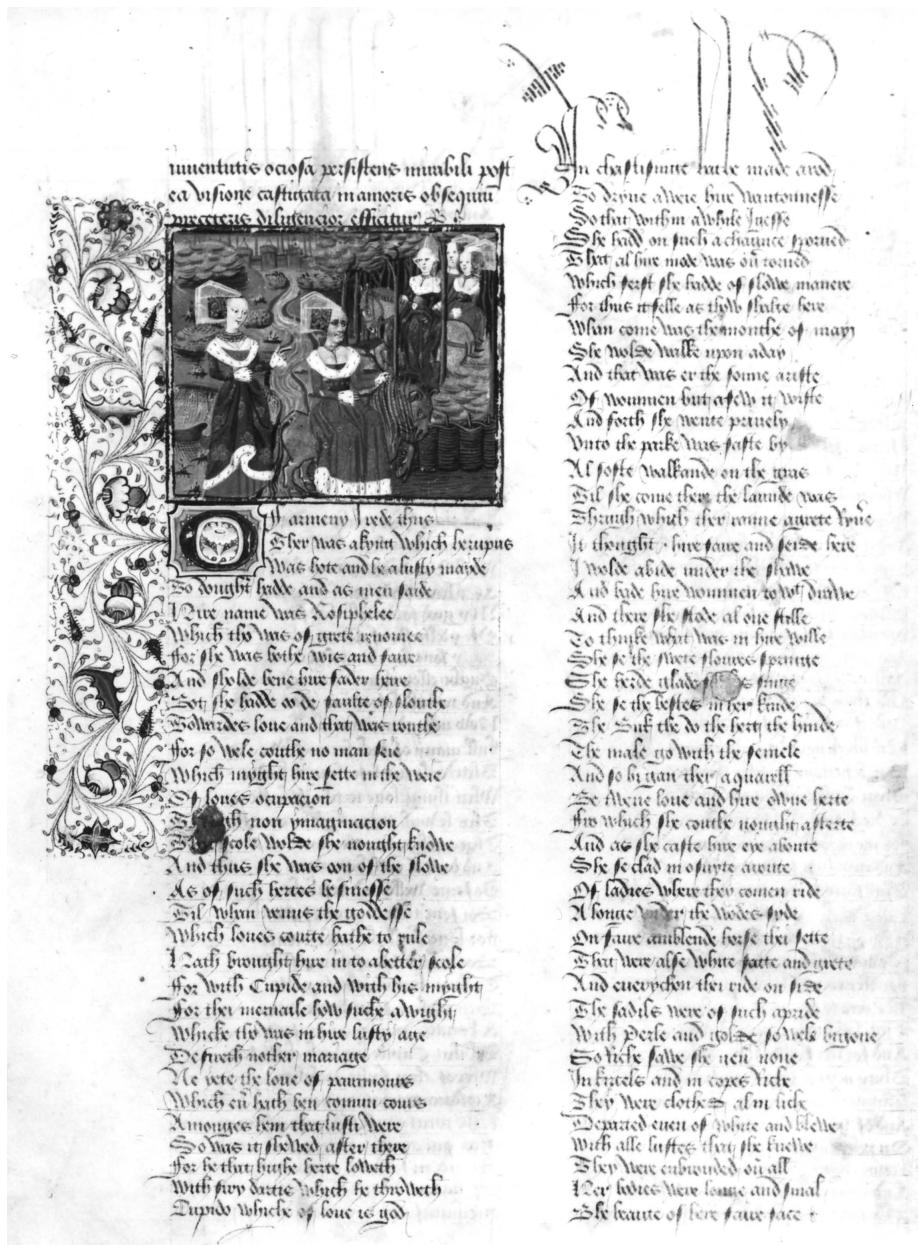


Fig. 8. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Rosiphelee Warned against Disdain', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 74<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

Between love and her owne herte'. Suddenly she sees 'aroute Of ladies where they comen ride'. The ladies are richly dressed and attired alike ('In kirtels and in copes Riche [...] . Departed euen of white and blewe [...]. They were embrouded ouer alle'). They ride sidesaddle ('thei ride on side') on richly gemmed saddles, and their horses are 'white fatte and grete'. Following after them rides a lone young woman in a torn garment who is seated on a pitiful black horse ('Al lene and galled on the bak And halted as he were enclued'). This lady carries with her 'twenty score of horse halters'. Drawing closer, Rosiphelee notices that this shabby young woman 'was right faire of face Al though her lacked other grace'.<sup>33</sup> The lady in rags explains that the ladies riding the fat white steeds have been rewarded because in life they were the true servants of love, but that because she resisted love in life, she now must carry the ladies' halters and act as their servant:

And euyere this fresshe maii  
 Thes lusty ladies ride aboute  
 And [rubbed or erased] mote nedes sue her route  
 In this manere as ye mow se  
 And trusse her halters forth with me  
 And am but bot as here horse knaue.

The lady then warns Rosiphelee, 'Of loue that thei be nought ydell' and then vanishes 'clene oute of this ladi sight'. Vividly dramatising her earlier internal debate, this vision transforms Rosiphelee who then returns home and vows to change her attitude toward love.<sup>34</sup>

The story of Rosiphelee is illustrated very simply in NC, MS 266. This miniature shows two young women, one on horseback (riding sidesaddle?) with horse halters hanging from her belt. She speaks to Rosiphelee, who wears a tiara. There are trees and a woven wattle fence in the background.<sup>35</sup> In the Morgan miniature, Rosiphelee, wearing an ermine-lined jacket over a gown and a cap with transparent veil, points across a river toward a similarly attired but much older woman

<sup>33</sup> This line differs from that in Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 338. See Macaulay's note to l. 1361.

<sup>34</sup> These lines have been transcribed from MS M. 126, fols 74v–75. See Macaulay, *The English Works*, I, 335–40. For further analysis of this story, see Kurt O. Olsson, 'Rhetoric, John Gower, and the Late Medieval Exemplum', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 8 (1977), 185–200 (pp. 194–95); Martha Dana Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Braeger, 'The Illustrations in New College MS. 266', fig. 3, pp. 283–84.

who rides a nag sidesaddle. This is not the young servant woman described in Gower's text; the wrinkled older woman is evidently intended to represent Rosiphelee's older self (if she continues to reject her suitors when young). Across the nag's neck hang many halters.<sup>36</sup> Three young ladies, also wearing caps with transparent veils, ride in a forest beyond a woven wattle fence. Rosiphelee is shown at the left in this miniature, the edge of her gown just breaking the picture frame.

As in this example, there are several miniatures in the Morgan manuscript in which figures break or extend beyond the frame. This seems artful and intentional, perhaps as a visual metaphor for Gower's stories, which are often reframed from earlier versions or are fitted sometimes uneasily into the stated subject of each book. Perhaps the most shocking instance of frame-breaking is shown in the miniature of Tereus cutting out Philomena's tongue (Fig. 9). The terrible dramatic action is foregrounded at the left, the transgression against Philomena further re-emphasized by the aggressive breaking of the frame by the foot of Tereus, which holds down her gown.<sup>37</sup> This illustration is interesting as well for its range of costume elements, which help to date and localize the manuscript.

<sup>36</sup> Citing *MED*, sense 2b, Rust interprets the halters carried by the old woman as representing the wedding bond. She comments that 'the halters inconveniently disclose that compliance with the duties of 'honest love' means bondage, especially for women' (*Imaginary Worlds*, p. 148). As equine equipment, a halter is a rope or strap used to catch, lead or groom a horse. There is no bit on a halter, nor are there reins or throat latch (conversation with Valeska C. Stupak, Claremont Riding Academy, New York, June 2005). The woman in the story who carries the halters describes herself as a servant, essentially the groom ('knav') of the white horses belonging to the other ladies. The word *halter* is also associated with spinsters, with a sixteenth-century reference, 'All that be Dian's maids are vowed to halter apes in hell', cited in the *OED*. See also the note on the famous line spoken by Beatrice in William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. by A. R. Humphreys, Arden Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 111 n. 37, which further indicates that the image of the halter associated with unmarried women is proverbial and suggests 'that this fate was reserved for virgins'. Pearsall, 'Gower Tradition', p. 192, cites a reader's gloss in another *Confessio MS*, London, British Library (BL), MS Harley 3869, at fol. 133<sup>v</sup>, in the story of Rosiphelee: 'Ware yee women þt yee bere non haltres'. The significance of the halters in Gower's text is obscure but may refer to the proverbial burden carried by spinsters.

<sup>37</sup> Fol. 122, Tereus cuts out Philomena's tongue; (L) Tereus in conical hat and jacket, cutting out the tongue of Philomena (her face rubbed) who is on her knees, praying. His foot is firmly placed on the hem of her dress; (Middle) trestle table with gold-lidded vessels and knife falling to the floor; king with hands raised, three birds above; (R) two statues of idols; woman in hennin with veil, raising her hand; woman in balzo holding a platter, with another woman wearing an ermine-lined dress and cap with transparent veil.



Fig. 9. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'Tereus Cuts Out the Tongue of Philomena', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 22<sup>r</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

Scott says the costume illustrated in the miniatures of MS M. 126 'is of a type introduced well after the accession of Edward IV (1461).'<sup>38</sup> In the scene of Tereus and Philomena, three kinds of headgear worn by women are shown: the hennin; the cap, or crespine headdress, with a transparent veil, sometimes called a butterfly veil; and the *balzo*, which is worn by several women in the manuscript, including Petronella of the Three Questions story, Galatea, Constance, Clytemnestra, Penelope, Jephtha's daughter, Araxarathen, and Medea, among others.<sup>39</sup> One can find illustrations of butterfly veils, or caps with transparent veils, throughout the fifteenth century, though in English manuscripts these tend to appear more often after 1450 and were apparently in fashion in England from the 1450s through the 1480s.<sup>40</sup>

While the cap with veil is quite frequently seen in English manuscripts made from the 1450s onwards, the hennin and *balzo* are more frequently found in Continental manuscripts. The hennin is the female headgear of choice in the presentation scene to Margaret of York, and we find it worn in almost all representations of Margaret as well as by other female figures in the *Hours of Engelbert of Nassau* painted by the Master of Mary of Burgundy.<sup>41</sup> We might also compare the low-cut belted dresses worn by the buxom ladies of the Tereus illumination with the dresses worn by Margaret of York in the copperplate frontispiece of the *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*, translated and printed by Caxton in Bruges,

<sup>38</sup> Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 324.

<sup>39</sup> The *balzo* is worn by women in MS M. 126 on, e.g., fols 26<sup>v</sup>, 29<sup>v</sup>, 32<sup>v</sup>, 42, 62, 68<sup>v</sup>, 76, 88, 108, 141, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Examples of the cap with veil may be seen in Morgan MS M. 876, copied in the mid-fifteenth century, and in Morgan M. 775, a mid- to late fifteenth-century compendium written and illuminated for Sir John Astley. Lotte Hellinga-Querido, 'Reading an Engraving: William Caxton's Dedication to Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy', in *Across the Narrow Seas: Studies in History and Bibliography*, ed. by Susan Roach (London: British Library, 1991), reproduces (fig. 2) a miniature from Pierre de Vaux, *Vie de Sainte Colette* (Ghent, Arme Klarenabdij, MS 8), in which Margaret of York is shown wearing a cap with transparent veils.

<sup>41</sup> For illustrations of the Book of Hours of Engelbert of Nassau, see *The Master of Mary of Burgundy*, intro. by J.J.G. Alexander (New York: Braziller, 1970). Other illustrations of Margaret may be seen in Hellinga-Querido, 'Reading', figs 4 and 5; and in Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York: Duchess of Burgundy 1446–1503* (New York: St Martin's, 1989). For further representations of the hennin, see also Thomas Kren and Scot McKendrick, *Illuminating the Other Renaissance: The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), e.g., figs 36a, 38d, 42, 43b, 65, 69, 70, 71a, 71b, 75b. Andrea G. Pearson, 'Gendered Subject, Gendered Spectator: Mary Magdalene in the Gaze of Margaret of York', *Gesta*, 44.1 (2005), 44–76, includes two reproductions of Margaret wearing hennin and veil (figs 1, 3).

c. 1473 to 1475, and dedicated by him to Margaret of York, the wife of Charles the Bold and sister of Edward IV.<sup>42</sup>

The *balzo*, on the other hand, originates in Italy and is rarely, if ever, seen in English manuscripts. The *balzo* is 'a bulbous headdress, consisting of a wire or possibly a willow understructure which was then covered by a textile [...] [and] often covered with gems, usually pearls, and with velvet'.<sup>43</sup> There are, however, examples to be found in the miniatures of Flemish manuscripts, particularly those associated with the Master of Mary of Burgundy and Simon Bening of Bruges. They also appear in modified form in woodcuts produced in Flanders and the Netherlands in the late fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Observation of hats and headdresses in MS M. 126 suggests that this manuscript was illustrated and made in the 1470s, most likely in Flanders, or by artists from that region.

### *The Scribe of MS M. 126*

The hand of MS M. 126, which has been attributed to the scribe Ricardus Franciscus, or Richard Franceys, employs decorative cads on ascenders and strapwork initials and uses a thick downstroke on long *s* and *f*, showing consistent use of an angular horned *g*, double *f*, single-compartment *a*, with looped ascenders on *h*, backward strokes on the ascender of *d*, occasional use of 2-shaped *r*, and the secretary form of *w*. The scribe further shows in the style of calligraphy the

<sup>42</sup> Driver, 'Printing the *Confessio Amantis*', fig. 5, p. 293.

<sup>43</sup> Jacqueline Herald, *Renaissance Dress in Italy 1400–1500*, in *The History of Dress Series*, ed. by Aileen Ribeiro (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1981), p. 50.

<sup>44</sup> In an illuminated Boethius printed by Arendt de Keyser in Ghent in 1485, Dame Philosophy wears a modified *balzo* (reproduced in *Splendours of Flanders: Late Medieval Art in Cambridge Collections, The Fitzwilliam Museum*, ed. by Alain Arnould and Jean Michel Massing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), fig. 57). A woman wears a *balzo* in the foreground of a miniature of Christ Nailed to the Cross in the Hours of Mary of Burgundy, painted by the Master of Mary of Burgundy (reproduced in *Renaissance Painting in Manuscripts: Treasures from the British Library*, ed. by Thomas Kren (New York: Hudson Hills, 1983), fig. 1); and a woman wears a jewelled *balzo* at the centre of the Genealogical Tree of John, Duke of Lancaster, painted by Simon Bening of Bruges, in Kren, *ibid.*, pl. 12. See also the *balzo* worn by Herodias, seated at a table, in an illustration of Salome with the head of John the Baptist. This woodcut, which recurs in editions of the *Vita Christi* of Ludolphus of Saxony printed at Zwolle by Petrus van Os in the 1490s, has been attributed to a woodcutter from Antwerp and is reproduced by M. J. Schretlen, *Dutch and Flemish Woodcuts of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Benn, 1925; repr. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1969), p. 36. Still other Flemish examples appear in Kren and McKendrick, *Illuminating the Other Renaissance*, figs 59, 62, 63a, 63b, 83a.

influence of French *lettre batarde*. The decorative cadels and strapwork initials are another clue that MS M. 126 was copied in the 1470s or later, since these features came into use in de luxe printed books of about the same period.<sup>45</sup>

The same features of script occur in a document recently uncovered by Lisa Jefferson that has been signed by Ricardus.<sup>46</sup> Jefferson has found the signature of Ricardus (whom she calls Richard Franceys) in a statute copied in French during the reign of Edward IV. The document is now housed in the Archives de Meurthe-et-Moselle in Nancy, France. Because it contains internal corrections made by the scribe, Jefferson suggests that Franceys was fluent in Continental French and was French by birth, an observation made by other scholars, including Richard Hamer (who says, 'He seems to have been French, or at least strongly influenced by French scribal models'), and Carol Meale, who states he was not English.<sup>47</sup>

The Nancy document is decorated with 'the arms of St George and encircled with the garter bearing the motto of the Order of the Garter: "hony soyt qui mal y pense"'.<sup>48</sup> Its seal has a large shield with the Garter arms on one side and the

<sup>45</sup> The use of decorative cadels was in vogue with the early printers by the 1480s. Antoine Vérard, for example, often includes cadels on his title pages. For examples, see John Macfarlane, *Antoine Vérard* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1900 for 1899), figs 55–63, 70, 74; and Mary Beth Winn, *Anthoine Vérard Parisian Publisher, 1485–1512* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1997), p. 421. For *lettre batarde*, see M. B. Parkes, *English Cursive Book Hands, 1250–1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 15, item 15. In a handwritten note in the Morgan catalogue, Kathleen Scott attributes the script of MS M. 126 to the scribe Ricardus Franciscus, as does Paul Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans, 1300–1500* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1990), p. 107, citing Jeremy Griffiths and Kathleen Scott as his source. Ricardus copied a number of MSS, one dated 1447 and signed, of the *Statutes of London* (now San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 932). Kate Harris briefly mentions 'the vogue scribe' Franciscus, associating him with MS M. 126, in her essay, 'The Role of Owners in Book Production and the Book Trade', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 178. For MSS attributed to Ricardus, see Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 323.

<sup>46</sup> Lisa Jefferson, 'Two Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts on the Statutes of the Order of the Garter', in *English Manuscript Studies, 1100–1700* (London: British Library, 1989–), v (1995), ed. by Peter Beal and Jeremy Griffiths, pp. 18–35. Jefferson includes a helpful list of works attributed to Franceys (p. 22).

<sup>47</sup> Richard Hamer, 'Spellings of the Fifteenth-Century Scribe Ricardus Franciscus', in *Five Hundred Years of Words and Sounds: A Festschrift for Eric Dobson*, ed. by E. G. Stanley and Douglas Gray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 63–73. Carol Meale, 'Book Production and Social Status', in *Book Production and Publishing* (see n. 45, above), p. 202.

<sup>48</sup> Jefferson, 'Two Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts', p. 21.

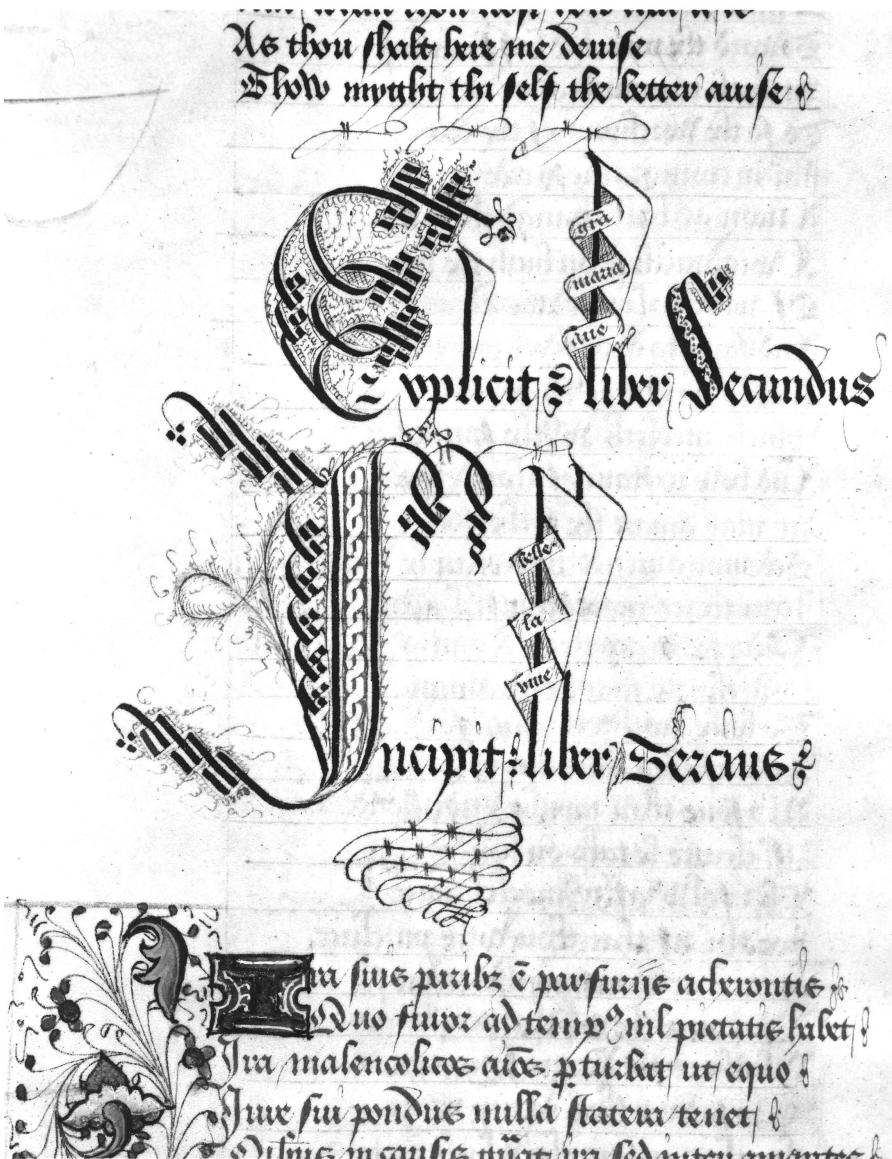


Fig. 10. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'viue la belle', 'aue marie gracia', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 50<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

initials of Edward IV on the other. Jefferson further suggests that this particular statute of the order was made for Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy. The document is dated 1467, though the Duke was not elected to the order until the following year, 'but negotiations about this (as about his marriage to the King's sister were taking place in 1467; it is by no means improbable that a highly ornate document could have been commissioned in readiness.'<sup>49</sup> Based on these observations, Ricardus was copying documents for the nobility, perhaps in Bruges, which may also be the place of origin of MS M. 126. And the scribe Ricardus also, in fact, signs his name in MS M. 126.

Within banderoles ornamenting decorative initials are inscriptions supplied by the scribe which the Morgan descriptive catalogue records as 'Belle Lavine', 'Une le Roy', and 'Roy Lavine'. 'Roy Lavine', says the Morgan catalogue, may be the scribe's name. These are all misreadings which overlook the playfulness of the scribe, who writes the inscriptions forwards, backwards, and even upside-down.<sup>50</sup> 'Vive le roy' and 'Vive la belle' occur, along with 'Ave Maria' (Fig. 10) and other Marian prayers, throughout the manuscript. The predominance of Marian prayers would seem to indicate a woman patron. Evidence of a female patron or owner may also be deduced from the first nota to appear: 'I wold fayn please my lady.' Another proclaims, 'viue Le roy Edward IVe'. There are also several mottoes: 'fido con no domini'; 'ma vie endure qd R'; 'prenes engre mon (coeur)' with a drawing of a heart; 'a mon plesir qd R'.<sup>51</sup> None of these mottoes can be readily

<sup>49</sup> Jefferson, 'Two Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts,' p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> This error is repeated by Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts*, p. 323.

<sup>51</sup> The inscriptions in the banderoles in the ascenders and descenders of the text of MS M. 126 have been supplied by the scribe. A complete list follows: fol. 34<sup>v</sup> in red, in banderole around ascender, top margin, 'I wold fayn please my lady'; fol. 39<sup>v</sup> in black ink, in banderole around ascender, top margin (left column), 'fido con no domini'; in red ink, in banderole around ascender, top margin (right column), 'ma vie endure qd R'; fol. 41<sup>v</sup> in red, in banderole around ascender, top margin, 'prenes engre mon (coeur) [drawing of a heart]'; fol. 42 in black, in banderole around ascender, top margin, 'viue Le roy Edward IVe [illegible?]''; fol. 50<sup>v</sup> in banderoles around ascenders in 'Explicit' and 'Incipit', first column, in red 'aue marie gracia', in black 'viue la belle'; fol. 65<sup>v</sup>, ascender, top margin, 'Vive La Belle quod Rychard'; fol. 67<sup>v</sup> in banderole around ascender in Incipit, first column, in red, 'viue Le Roy'; fol. 70<sup>v</sup> in banderole around descender, in second column, in red, 'aue maria'; fol. 91 in banderole around ascender in first column, in red, 'viue La belle'; fol. 95 in banderole around ascender in first column, in black, 'viue le Roy'; fol. 99 in banderole around descender in second column, in black, 'Aue maria gracia plena dominus'; fol. 101 in banderole around ascender in second column (text reversed), in black, 'a mon plesir qd R'; fol. 103 royal arms of England, crowned, in miniature; fol. 103<sup>v</sup> in banderole around ascender, first column, in red, 'viue Le Roy'; fol. 104 in banderole around ascender, second column, in red, 'aue maria gracia'; fol. 135<sup>v</sup>

traced, although there are at least three other manuscripts in which the ‘prenes engre’ inscription occurs, one of which was also copied by Ricardus Franciscus. This is a collection of treatises on heraldry (Bodleian, MS Ashmole 764); in a descender of the Explicit on folio 97 has been written ‘prenez engre Je vous prie’. Carol Meale has found the inscription ‘Prenes: Engre’ in a banderole in a drawing of a man presenting a woman with a book in Bodleian, MS Ashmole 45, a copy of *The Erle of Tolous*. ‘Prenes engre’ occurs also in a copy of Boccaccio’s *Genealogiae deorum*, most likely copied from the edition printed at Cologne c. 1473, and later in the printed editions of 1523 and 1568 of *The Garland of Laurel*, composed by John Skelton when he was the guest of the Countess of Surrey, and dedicated to her and to her ladies.<sup>52</sup>

in banderole around ascender, first column, in red, ‘aue maria gracia’; fol. 137 in banderole around ascender, second column, in red, ‘aue maria gracia plena’; fol. 139<sup>v</sup> in banderole around ascender, first column, in black, ‘aue gracia plena’; fol. 140 in banderole around descender, first column, in black, ‘Aue maria gracia plena dominus’, and in banderole around ascender, second column (reversed), in black, ‘Ecce ancilla dominus fiat’. The predominance of Marian prayers and other inscriptions would seem to indicate a royal woman patron.

<sup>52</sup> The Ashmole 764 inscription is reproduced in Otto Pächt and J. J. G. Alexander, *Illustrated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966–73), I, pl. 57, but incorrectly transcribed by them as ‘Prie vous en grez. Je nez en prie’. Carol M. Meale, ‘Prenes: engre’: An Early Sixteenth-Century Presentation Copy of *The Erle of Tolous*, in *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. by Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers, and Judith Weiss (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 221–36, has found the inscription ‘Prenes: Engre’ in a banderole on fol. 2 of MS Ashmole 45, a copy of *The Erle of Tolous*, copied 1520–30 and commissioned ‘by a prosperous member of the middle classes’ (p. 233). In a note, Meale mentions that a scroll with a similar inscription occurs in a ‘copy of Boccaccio’s *Genealogiae deorum* dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, now Exeter Cathedral Library, MS 3529’ (p. 235 n. 29). Ker describes this manuscript (N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–92), II, 836–37, item 3529) as having probably been ‘copied from the edition printed at Cologne c 1473 [...]. A scroll below the last words on f 166<sup>v</sup> bears “Prandez en gre. moun cur”, perhaps a Grey family motto, in the main hand’. The manuscript was written in England, a ‘gift to the Benedictine abbey of St Augustine’s Canterbury: ‘Bocacius de Geneologia deorum de adquisicione D’ patricii Grey. de librario sancti Augustini extra Cant’. In a note, Ker remarks that P. Grey, whom he elsewhere describes as ‘dom Patricius Grey’ (*Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books*, ed. by N. R. Ker, 2nd edn (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1964), p. 164), had the keeping of this volume in the St Augustine’s catalogue, c. 1500. I have not been able to ascertain whether this Patrick Grey was related to Elizabeth Woodville’s first husband. There was also another important early collector, William Grey, whose ninety-eight manuscripts survive at Balliol College, Oxford.

In a note in my article in *Re-visioning Gower*, I somewhat slavishly listed all twenty of the scribal inscriptions in the ascenders and descenders of MS M. 126. When I looked at the manuscript again more recently, I found one more. Upside-down in an ascender in the top margin of folio 65<sup>v</sup> is written: 'Vive La Belle quod Rycharde' (Fig. 11). Though the name 'Rycharde' in the ascender seems jotted hurriedly and is written in less formal script, it is very similar to that of the autograph in the Garter document uncovered by Jefferson and made at the command of Edward IV. And if we link the name 'Rycharde' to the other inscriptions in MS M. 126, 'Rycharde' might also very well be the 'R' in 'ma vie endure qd R' and 'a mon plesir qd R', heraldic mottoes that again suggest that Ricardus worked in the highest aristocratic circles.

Still further internal evidence in MS M. 126 suggests a royal patron. The arms of England, identified as those of Edward IV, later used as well by Edward V and Richard III, appear on folio 103 in a miniature introducing the story of Emperor Frederick and the two beggars. If 'Le roy' in MS M. 126 refers to Edward IV, as these arms and one of the inscriptions indicates, the identity of 'La belle' may be slightly more difficult to ascertain. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the father of Elizabeth Woodville, Edward's queen, 'was regarded as the handsomest man in England', and she herself is described as beautiful in contemporary accounts (perhaps a conventional reference). In some sources, Elizabeth herself is said to be cited in the wardrobe books of Margaret of Anjou, whom she served in the capacity of Lady of the Bedchamber, as 'Lady Isabella Grey'. The name 'Isabella', explains the *DNB*, 'was in those days a mere variation of Elizabeth'. The two names, 'Dame Isabella' and 'Elizabeth Grey', are found interchangeably in earlier documents of Queen Margaret's officials.<sup>53</sup> Even if 'La

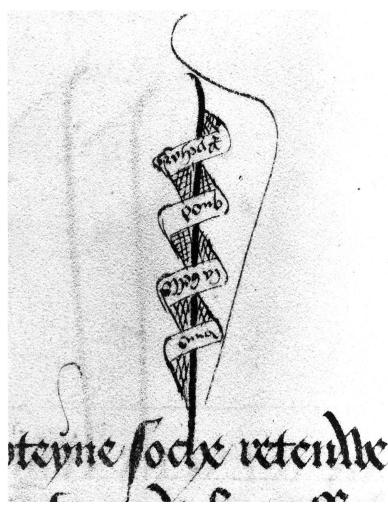


Fig. 11. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 'vive la belle quod Rycharde', New York, The Morgan Library, MS M. 126, fol. 65<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced with permission of The Morgan Library and Museum.

<sup>53</sup> *The Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), IX, 614. See also George Smith, *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville, Queen Consort of Edward VI* (London: Ellis, 1935), p. 27, who cites the name Dame

Belle' of the inscriptions is not a word game played with the name 'Isabella' (or possibly even Elizabeth?), the evidence seems to point to Elizabeth Woodville, beautiful daughter of the handsome Sir Richard Woodville and wife of Edward IV, as an early owner of MS M. 126.

Elizabeth stands at the centre of a network reaching into France and Flanders of book collectors and book patrons. She is known to have owned several important de luxe manuscripts, at least one of them inherited from her aristocratic mother, Jacquetta de St Pol, daughter of one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Luxembourg and northern France. Jacquetta's first husband was John, Duke of Bedford, who during his Paris regency 'employed Parisian illuminators to make books for him, such as the Bedford Missal (BL Add. 18850)'.<sup>54</sup>

One book Elizabeth inherited from Jacquetta was the *Collected Works* of Christine de Pizan (London, British Museum, MS Harleian 4431), which had also formerly been in the possession of her brother, the bibliophile Anthony, Lord Rivers, prior to his execution. This book was originally acquired by the Duke of Bedford in Paris: 'This and other manuscripts from the royal library in the Louvre eventually made their way to England, where they came into the possession of the duke's widow Jacquette of Luxembourg'.<sup>55</sup> The *Collected Works* of Christine contains the signature of Jacquetta ('Jaquete') on a flyleaf, as

Isabella or Elizabeth Grey as found interchangeably 'in earlier documents of Queen Margaret's officials'. The latest version of the *DNB* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> casts some doubt on this, however, stating that 'identifications of her [Elizabeth Woodville] with Queen Margaret of Anjou's attendant Dame Isabella Grey are probably mistaken'. David Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), p. 4, traces the placing of Elizabeth in Margaret's retinue to Thomas More and says More probably confused Elizabeth 'with Lady Isabella Grey, [...] a married woman who had accompanied Margaret to England (when Elizabeth Woodville was only eight), or perhaps with another Elizabeth Grey who served the Queen but who is known to have been a widow and mother in 1445'. See also David Mac Gibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville (1437–1492): Her Life and Times* (London: Barker, 1938), pp. 17–18, however, who comments that Elizabeth 'was appointed to one of the four ladies of the bedchamber of Queen Margaret, in whose wardrobe-book she is mentioned as "Domina Isabella Grey in attendance on the Queen's person"'.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret Rickert, *Painting in Britain in the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 1954), p. 195.

<sup>55</sup> Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), p. 214. Smith, *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, p. 54, suggests that the volume of Christine's Works was given after the death of Jacquetta 'by her son Anthony to the Flemish noble who had befriended King Edward and himself when they were in exile'. Smith further mentions Elizabeth's father as a collector of books (p. 12). He acquired 'The Romance of Alexander', now one of the gems of the Bodleian Library, in which it is recorded that he bought the book in the year 1466 'le Ve an de la coronacion de la tres victorieuse roy Eduard quart et le second de la coronacion de la tres vertueuze royne Elizabeth'.

well as that of Elizabeth's brother, Anthony, and also has the signature of Louis de Bruges, Seigneur de Gruthuyse. The volume of Christine's collected works was presumably given to Louis in gratitude after Jacquetta's death for his kindness in befriending Edward IV during his Bruges exile of 1470 to 1471.

It is also known that while Edward was in Bruges (during which period Elizabeth Woodville was given sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, where she gave birth to her first son, Edward, later Edward V), he 'bought and ordered in Bruges manuscripts illuminated and painted in the highly realistic Flemish manner of the developed Northern Renaissance [...]. Certain it is that Flemish painters returned with Edward to England.'<sup>56</sup> During his exile, when he spent the winter at the home of Louis de Gruthuyse, Edward was influenced by Louis to begin buying books and became the first king to establish a royal library. As Doyle remarks, 'there is no evidence of a continuous library before Edward IV', and as Margaret Kekewich has pointed out, Edward's 'sojourn in Bruges as a guest to the pro-Yorkist Seigneur de Gruthuyse, must have provoked a desire to possess some sumptuous Flemish manuscripts'.<sup>57</sup>

Another book that may have come to Elizabeth through her mother is a volume of Arthurian romances in French (BL, MS Royal 14 E.III), containing the *Vulgata Quest* and *La Mort Artu*. The names of two of her daughters, Elizabeth and Cecily, are written on the flyleaves, along with the autograph 'E. Wydevyll' on the last flyleaf. There is also a poem, written by a contemporary, composed on the Battle of Barnet, when Edward IV successfully overcame Warwick, that has been dedicated to Elizabeth (BL, MS Royal D. xv, fols 327–332<sup>v</sup>).<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Rickert, *Painting in Britain*, p. 197.

<sup>57</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'English Books in and out of Court from Edward III to Henry VII', in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 174. Doyle comments that Edward IV 'appears to have been the first king to commission books in quantity, although from abroad'. See also Margaret Kekewich, 'Edward IV, William Caxton, and Literary Patronage in Yorkist England', *Modern Language Review*, 66 (1971), 481–87 (p. 482).

<sup>58</sup> Mac Gibbon further cites a book in French belonging to Elizabeth's daughters Elizabeth and Cecily 'of the death and testamentary disposition of Sultan Amarah', though this volume has yet to be traced (*Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 208 n. 6). The poem on Barnet is cited by Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'Choosing a Book in Late Fifteenth-Century England and Burgundy', in *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Caroline Barron and Nigel Saul (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 62, p. 87 n. 18. See also Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "A Most Benevolent Queen": Queen Elizabeth Woodville's Reputation, her Piety and her Books', *The Ricardian*, 10 (1995), 214–45 (pp. 224–25). Some of the books owned by Elizabeth Woodville are also cited briefly by Kekewich, p. 486.

Among several religious books possibly owned by Elizabeth is a manuscript of John Lydgate's *Life of our Lady* (New Haven, Yale University Library, MS 281), copied c. 1470, along with fragments of *Lessons and Collects* (Toronto, Bergendal Collection, MS 60) in Latin and French, which was certainly owned by her.<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth's ownership of a small Book of Hours containing the Hours of the Guardian Angel as well as an acrostic of her name and a miniature of the Queen receiving the book from an anonymous female donor has also been well documented, along with her related associations with the Bridgettine Order, an order supported by both Edward IV and Elizabeth that was particularly known for its circulation and translations into English of religious texts.<sup>60</sup>

A book commissioned by Elizabeth and mentioned in her account rolls as a 'large and precious ('recio') book', title unknown, was copied for ten pounds ('per manus Willelmi Wulflete, clericu nuper cancellarii universitatis Cantebrigensis, £10, ut in precio unius libri eidem domine regine venditi'). The scribe William Wulflete, or Wolflete, formerly a master of Clare Hall, was Chancellor of Cambridge University. The Queen's secretary, John Aleyn, is also mentioned in her accounts. Aleyn 'was allowed almost as much for parchment, vellum, paper, red wax and ink, as the receiver-general himself, [though] these payments were identical with those paid in Queen Margaret's household and may be traditional'.<sup>61</sup> Two letters composed by Elizabeth have come down to us, and also a poem, 'Queen Elizabeth's Hymn to Venus' (a complex sestina in which the line 'I praye to Venus of good continuaunce' is repeated), that is attributed to

<sup>59</sup> A. I. Doyle, 'English Books', p. 174, says the Yale manuscript of *Life of our Lady* contains a note 'that it was given to a queen, perhaps Elizabeth Woodville'. See Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, 'Choosing a Book', p. 87 n. 18.

<sup>60</sup> Liverpool, University Library, Liverpool Cathedral, MS Radcliffe 6. The presentation miniature appears on fol. 5<sup>v</sup> and shows Elizabeth enthroned with flowing hair and crown. This manuscript is discussed by Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'The Cult of Angels in Late Fifteenth-Century England: An Hours of the Guardian Angel Presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville', in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. by Jane H. M. Taylor and Lesley Smith (London: British Library and University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 230–65; and described in J. J. G. Alexander and others, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Treasures in the North West: An Exhibition Held at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 15 January–28 February* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1976), p. 29, item 49. The Bridgettines were great promoters and translators of religious books into English, and it is possible that some of their manuscripts found their way into the royal collections early on. The youngest child of Elizabeth and Edward was named after St Bridget of Sweden and later became a nun at Dartford.

<sup>61</sup> A. R. Myers, 'The Household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, 1466–7', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 50 (1967–68), 207–35, 443–81 (p. 481, p. 213).

her.<sup>62</sup> The Huntington Library copy of William Caxton's *Recuyell of the Histories of Troy*, with its unique presentation frontispiece, was also owned by Elizabeth Woodville, who was, of course, the sister-in-law of Margaret of York, the patron and 'redoubtful lady' of Caxton's volume.<sup>63</sup> This book contains the ownership inscription: 'This book is mine Queen Elizabeth late wife unto the most noble King Edward the Fourth of whose both souls I beseech Almighty God take to his infinite mercy above.'<sup>64</sup> Patronage of Caxton in England has been attributed not only to Edward IV and Elizabeth's brother, Anthony, Earl Rivers, but also to Elizabeth herself: 'It is indeed probable that the Royal patronage of Caxton was due in no small degree to Rivers's and [Elizabeth's] influence.'<sup>65</sup>

Anthony, Lord Rivers, is connected with several books from Caxton's press, including the first publication of a work by Christine de Pizan, a translation by him of the *Moral Proverbs*, and the *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers*, a translation made by Rivers for the 'use of his pupil', that is, for Edward, the young prince, as Rivers tells his readers in the prologue.<sup>66</sup> In the manuscript, which was

<sup>62</sup> Both surviving letters are published in *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100–1547*, ed. by Anne Crawford (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1994), pp. 135–36. The poem (IMEV 2179), a complex sestina, appears in Bodleian, MS Rawlinson C.86, fols 155v–156, and is reprinted in *Women's Writing in Middle English*, ed. by Alexandra Barratt (New York: Longman, 1992), pp. 275–77. There is also a diary, probably spurious, attributed to Elizabeth Woodville. See Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville*, Appendix 3, pp. 155–58.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret of York, sister of Edward IV, was among the immediate party in the coronation ceremonies of Elizabeth Woodville, following the Duchess of Buckingham, who 'bare up the Quenys trayne', and walking with the Duchess of Suffolk, another sister of Edward IV, and the Duchess of Bedford, Elizabeth Woodville's mother (Smith, *The Coronation of Elizabeth Wydeville*, p. 16). Margaret married Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, three years later. See also *The Recuyell of the Histories of Troye*, ed. by H. Oskar Sommer, 2 vols (London: Nutt, 1894), III, fol. 251, p. 503; Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York: Duchess of Burgundy 1446–1503* (New York: St Martin's, 1989), p. 212; Herman Ralph Mead, *Incunabula in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library & Art Gallery, 1937), p. 225, who cites this as the 'Devonshire copy'.

<sup>64</sup> In a footnote in *William Caxton: A Biography* (New York: Putnam's, 1977), p. 63 n.1, George D. Painter points out that '[t]he inscription is not in the Queen's autograph, but written by "Thomas Shukburgh the Younger", presumably a secretary who was putting her library in order after her widowhood in 1483; so it is quite possible that she possessed the book long before'.

<sup>65</sup> Mac Gibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 208.

<sup>66</sup> *The morale prouerbes of Cristyne* [STC 7273], translated in verse by A. Wydeville, 'therle Ryueris', is also mentioned briefly in Julia Boffey, 'Richard Pynson's *Book of Fame* and the Letter to Dido', *Viator*, 19 (1988), 339–53 (p. 339), and by Martha Driver, 'Mirrors of a Collective Past: Re-considering Images of Medieval Women', in *Women and the Book* (see n. 60, above), p. 79. See



Fig. 12. *Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers*, trans. by Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers, 'Frontispiece', London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 265, late fifteenth century. Reproduced with permission of Lambeth Palace Library.

copied on vellum in the 1470s directly from Caxton's imprint (London, Lambeth Palace, MS 265), there is a prefatory miniature that shows Rivers, wearing his armour and a surcoat with his coat of arms, kneeling and handing a book to the King (Fig. 12), as young Edward, Elizabeth, and several courtiers look on.

The Queen in this case is shown with flowing hair, much as she is in the *Book of the Fraternity of the Assumption of Our Lady* (Fig. 13), in which she is shown in her coronation robes and wearing her hair loose beneath a closed imperial crown.

Willard, *Christine de Pizan*, pp. 214–15, for a bibliographical description of works translated by Rivers and published by Caxton. These are listed in Paul Needham, *The Printer & the Pardoner* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1986), p. 85, Cx 26, Cx 30, Cx 34; p. 86, Cx 38; p. 90, Cx 93.



Fig. 13. *Book of the Fraternity of the Assumption*, 'Elizabeth Woodville in her Coronation Robes', London, Guildhall, MS 31692, late fifteenth century. Reproduced with permission of The Skinners' Company, London.



Fig. 14. Anonymous, *Elizabeth Woodville*, oil on wood, The Royal Collection. Reproduced with permission of H. M. Elizabeth II.

Wearing long and unbound hair was the prerogative of virgins and queens, a display of a queen's estate, perhaps also alluding to the Queen of Heaven.<sup>67</sup> The ermine kirtle and the ermine-lined mantle in the latter illustration, completed in 1472, are similar to those worn by Penelope and Dido in MS M. 126 and are perhaps more generally reflective of the regal fashion of the day.

As queen, Elizabeth funded pious and educational projects, becoming a sister of fraternities of the Holy Trinity, Luton, the Parish Clerks of London, and the Assumption of the Virgin of the London Skinners and of Christchurch Cathedral, Canterbury.<sup>68</sup> She was also a learned benefactress of Queens' College, Cambridge.<sup>69</sup> A contemporary oil portrait shows her as foundress of Queen's College, wearing a cap with short veil, like many of the ladies in MS M. 126.<sup>70</sup> There is a related painting, also contemporary and also showing her wearing cap with veil, in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle (Fig. 14). In these portraits of Elizabeth, the transparent veil may signify her widowhood after the death of her first husband, a detail also seen in the depiction of Elizabeth in the stained-glass window of the Martyrdom Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral (Fig. 15), believed to have been rendered from life, perhaps by John Prudde, the King's glazier at Westminster.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps the similarity of headdress between portraits of Elizabeth Woodville and many of the ladies we have seen in MS M. 126 is simply another indication of the fashionableness of the Queen and of the pictures in the manuscript.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth is also shown crowned with flowing hair in Liverpool Cathedral, MS Radcliffe 6, fol. 5<sup>v</sup>, as noted by Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, 'Cult of Angels', p. 238. For comparisons between this miniature and depictions of the Virgin Mary, see J. L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445–1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 33, also p. 33 n. 26. Other portraits, among them, a miniature in the Luton Guild Book, are discussed by Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville*, pp. 144–45.

<sup>68</sup> Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, 'Cult of Angels', p. 241. Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, "A Most Benevolent Queen", p. 234.

<sup>69</sup> John Speed, in *The History of Great Britain Under the Conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London: [n. pub.], 1650), says that Queen's College, Cambridge, was begun by Margaret, wife of Henry VI, and completed after her death by 'Q. Elizabeth, wife to King Edward 4. [who] obtained licence to finish the same, which shee accomplished in the sixt of Edward 4' (fol. 801<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>70</sup> Mac Gibbon cites five portraits of Elizabeth in Queens' College, Cambridge: 'Besides the old panel portrait on wood in the Combination-Room, and the copy of this portrait painted by Hudson in the Hall, there are three others in the President's Lodge, of which two are in the Gallery, and the third is in the Audit Room' (*Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 212).

<sup>71</sup> Mac Gibbon, *Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 211. See also Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville*, p. 145.



Fig. 15. Anonymous, *Elizabeth Woodville*, stained glass, Canterbury Cathedral, Martyrdom Chapel. Reproduced with permission of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.

Or perhaps, as in the story of Rosiphelee, the manuscript miniatures were planned in much the same way as Gower's text functions — to act as a mirror, reflecting the features of the reader or viewer. In the leaves of MS M. 126, women are portrayed as powerful, wealthy, regal, and intelligent. In such a book, a queen might see her own reflection. Given the visual evidence provided by MS M. 126, the script, the iconography, and the suggestive scribal inscriptions decorating the ascenders and descenders, I strongly suspect it was made for a woman in the circles of Edward IV, most probably for the beautiful Elizabeth Woodville.



# TRANSLATING WOMEN, TRANSLATING TEXTS: GOWER'S 'TALE OF TEREUS' AND THE CASTILIAN AND PORTUGUESE TRANSLATIONS OF THE *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

María Bullón-Fernández

When he wrote the *Confessio Amantis* in Middle English, Gower was unlikely to have anticipated that his work would be translated into two other vernacular languages, Portuguese and Castilian, not too long after he finished his poem — some time between the last decade of the fourteenth century and the first two or three decades of the fifteenth. The *Confysion del Amante*, Juan de Cuenca's Castilian translation of the *Confessio*, has been available to modern scholars since 1909 when Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld published its first modern edition.<sup>1</sup> This edition had many flaws, though, and has been superseded by Elena Alvar's more reliable, although still somewhat flawed, edition from 1990.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Castilian text, the Portuguese translation has been

I would like to thank Joyce Coleman for giving me very helpful feedback on an early draft of this essay, sending me copies of two forthcoming essays, and giving me permission to cite from a third one. I also wish to thank Theresa Earenfight. Our conversations on medieval queens and female regents have inspired some of the observations I make in this essay. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Antonio Cortijo Ocaña for generously sharing with me his work on the Portuguese translation even in its early stages.

<sup>1</sup> *Confision del Amante por Joan Goer*, ed. by Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld (Leipzig: Seele, 1909). Birch-Hirschfeld's edition is itself based on a transcription by Hermann Knust.

<sup>2</sup> *John Gower: Confesión del Amante; Traducción de Juan de Cuenca (s. xv)*, ed. by Elena Alvar, Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia Española, 45 (Madrid: Anejos del Boletín de la Real Academia Española, 1990).

lost to us until relatively recently, although we have known about it through Juan de Cuenca himself, who mentions in his own text that he based it on a Portuguese translation by Robert Payn.<sup>3</sup> In the early 1990s a Portuguese translation, which may or may not have been the exact same text that Juan de Cuenca mentions, was discovered in the Biblioteca de Palacio in Madrid.<sup>4</sup> This discovery has given renewed impetus to studies of both translations.

Scholars have revisited the possible circumstances surrounding the translations, giving more nuanced answers than in the past to questions such as who were the translators of each version, when did they write their translations, why, and for whom.<sup>5</sup> Analyses of the literary aspects of the Portuguese and Castilian texts, however, have been more scarce. In the case of Juan de Cuenca's version a few scholars have considered the relation between the translation and Gower's text

<sup>3</sup> For studies of the Castilian text that predate the discovery of the Portuguese version, see Bernardo Santano Moreno, *Estudio sobre 'Confessio Amantis' de John Gower y su versión castellana, 'Confisyon del amante' de Juan de Cuenca* (Cáceres: Universidad de Extremadura, 1990) and 'Reflexiones en torno a la presencia de *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower en la península Ibérica', *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1992), 147–64; Emilio Lorenzo Criado, 'La primera traducción del inglés', in *Fidus interpres: Actas de las primeras Jornadas nacionales de historia de la traducción*, ed. by Julio-César Santoyo, 2 vols (León: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de León, 1987–89), I, 354–66; Robert Wayne Hamm, 'A Critical Evaluation of the *Confisyon del Amante*, the Castilian Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Medium Aevum*, 47 (1978), 91–106; P. E. Russell, 'Robert Payn and Juan de Cuenca, Translators of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Medium Aevum*, 30 (1961), 26–32; Karl Pietsch, 'Zum Texte der *Confision del Amante* por Joan Goer', *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, 46 (1926), 428–44. For studies that considered the possible existence of the Portuguese translation before the recent discovery and on the basis of Juan de Cuenca's reference to it, see Karl Pietsch, 'Zur Frage nach der portugiesischen Übersetzung von Gowers *Confessio Amantis*', in *The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923; repr. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp. 323–27, and J. M. Manly, 'On the Question of the Portuguese Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Modern Philology*, 27 (1929–30), 467–72.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of this discovery and initial analyses of the manuscripts, see two articles by Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, 'La traducción portuguesa de la *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower', *Euphrosyne*, 23 (1995), 457–61, and 'O Livro do Amante: The Lost Portuguese Translation of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (Madrid, Biblioteca de Palacio, MS II-3088)', *Portuguese Studies*, 13 (1997), 1–6.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to Cortijo Ocaña's essays, see R. F. Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity: The Iberian Connection', *Viator*, 35 (2004), 483–515, and Joyce Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal — and Patron of the Gower Translations?', in *England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th c.–15th c.: Cultural, Literary, and Political Exchanges*, ed. by María Bullón-Fernández (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 135–65.

from a literary point of view in an attempt to interpret the differences between the two.<sup>6</sup> But no sustained literary analyses of the Portuguese text as a whole have been published, which is understandable since the discovery of the Portuguese translation is still relatively recent and there is as of yet no complete edition available.<sup>7</sup> Nor have any attempts been made to analyse the three versions, the two translations, and Gower's text, simultaneously. This essay thus tries to break new ground. Although it focuses on only one tale, it compares Gower's text to the translations, analysing and interpreting the modifications introduced by the translators and relating them to their historical and political contexts. This essay hopes to demonstrate first that the circumstances surrounding the translations can be a key to understanding the texts and the differences among them and second that those differences can in turn help us understand the historical circumstances that led to the production of the translations.

Although we do not yet know enough about these circumstances and we do not have definitive dates for the translations, it seems most likely that both were connected to the marriages of John of Gaunt's daughters, Philippa and Catherine of Lancaster, to two Iberian kings, João I of Portugal and Enrique III of Castile, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Such marriages of royal and aristocratic daughters to foreign rulers

<sup>6</sup> See Santano Moreno, *Estudio sobre 'Confessio Amantis'*, and Hamm, 'A Critical Evaluation of the *Confysion del Amante*'. For an analysis of the reception of the Castilian translation in Castile, see Francisco Javier Quejigo and Bernardo Santano Moreno, 'The Love Debate Tradition in the Reception of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in the Iberian Peninsula', *Disputatio*, 5 (2002), 103–26.

<sup>7</sup> As this book goes to press, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña is close to finishing the first modern edition of the Portuguese translation, parts of which he has co-edited with Maria do Carmo de Correia Oliveira. This edition, which includes detailed notes and useful introductions to some of the books, can be found online at *eHumanista*: <<http://www.ehumanista.ucsb.edu/projects/index.shtml>> [accessed 28 May 2009]. Cortijo and Oliveira have also written the first analyses of specific sections of the Portuguese text; see, for instance, 'El libro VII de la *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower', *Revista de literatura medieval*, 19 (2007), 7–124, and Maria do Carmo de Correia Oliveira, 'Sobre muse e a Musa: (com)textos de sabedoria em *Confessio Amantis* de John Gower e sua tradução ibérica', *eHumanista*, 3 (2003), 1–18.

<sup>8</sup> Critics have differed on the likelihood that the queens had a direct involvement with the translations, but the recent discovery of the Portuguese version, which is dated 1430 and seems to be a copy of an earlier exemplar, proves that some of the later dates which have been proposed are incorrect and thus that the translations are likely to have been done during the queens' lifetimes. For a recent assessment of this likelihood, see Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity'. Yeager, however, argues that even though it is most likely that the translations had to do with the queens, we should consider other possible patrons. See also Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster, Queen of Portugal — and Patron of the Gower Translations?', an essay which argues for the direct

were, of course, a common practice in the Middle Ages. Significantly, I will show, this practice is examined in the Iberian translations of one particular tale in the *Confessio*, the ‘Tale of Tereus’ (v.5551–6047), thus shedding light implicitly on the foreign marriages of Philippa and Catherine and on their ‘translations’ from England to Portugal and Castile. Although the Castilian and Portuguese translations of the *Confessio* follow Gower’s Middle English version closely, they still depart from it at significant points. Gower himself, we will see, had approached his own source text, Ovid’s version of the story in the *Metamorphoses* (VI. 412–676), differently, introducing radical changes and making the story his own. While Ovid raises questions about the exchange of women between men and about the father-daughter bond, Gower is interested in the daughter’s identification not only with her father, but more generally with her birth family. More so than Ovid, Gower develops the bond between the sisters, Philomena and Progne, and examines the latter’s pull between her husband and her birth family.<sup>9</sup> This reinterpretation of Ovid’s story, I will show, is taken even further by the two Iberian translators (more so by Juan de Cuenca), both of whom comment on the practice of arranged foreign marriages and the question of the wife’s identification with her birth family to a greater degree than does Gower, raising questions about the extent to which a daughter changes loyalty when she marries. I will end with an analysis of the relation between these translations and the translations of Philippa and Catherine to Portugal and Castile. Reading the three versions of the ‘Tale of Tereus’ side by side allows us to illuminate the fears and anxieties associated with the ‘translation’ of actual royal and aristocratic women through marriages to foreign royal and aristocratic men and to raise complex and significant questions about this other process of ‘translation’.

Before analysing the different versions of the tale, we need to consider generally the relationship between the translations and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. In *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Rita Copeland has distinguished between two forms of translation in the Middle Ages: ‘primary’ and

involvement of Philippa of Lancaster with both translations and does a helpful overview of the different theories about the dating and the links with the queens.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Casebier, ‘Ovid’s Medieval Metamorphosis: Techniques of Persuasion in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Philomena*’, *Philological Quarterly*, 80 (2001), 441–62, points briefly to the tension Procne experiences between her two families in Chrétien’s own version: ‘Procne must choose between her duty as a sister and her duty as a wife’ (p. 454). In this essay I will use the more common medieval form ‘Philomena’ whenever I refer to her in a medieval work, while I will use the Latin ‘Philomela’ whenever I write about the classical version. Similarly, I will use ‘Progne’ for the medieval character and ‘Procne’ for the classical version of the character.

secondary'.<sup>10</sup> Although Copeland's book studies only vernacular translations of academic discourse and although she specifically cautions the reader against applying her arguments to all forms of translation in the Middle Ages, the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' forms of translation is particularly applicable and illuminating in the case of the translations of the *Confessio*.<sup>11</sup> For one thing, Gower's *Confessio* itself, as Copeland has shown, is a vernacular 'translation' of academic discourse, and thus even if the two Iberian translations of the poem are one step removed from academic discourse, they are, as translations of an imitation of academic discourse, still immersed in the same discourse.<sup>12</sup> Copeland calls 'primary' the type of translations that 'announce themselves as translations by calling attention to their dependence upon — and service to — the original text'. These are not the same as 'literal' translations because they still incorporate exegetical materials not found in their source, and, more importantly, because 'even as they proclaim themselves to be serving and supplementing the text, they work in effect to contest and supplant that text'. In the case of the 'secondary' form, by contrast, 'the rhetorical motive takes precedence so that the translations tend to define themselves as independent textual productions'.<sup>13</sup> Conceiving these two forms as standing at opposite ends of a continuum, Copeland shows that Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is an extreme example of 'secondary' translation:

The individual tales are best defined by their differences from the sources, and in fact can scarcely be read as translations. It marks the point on our continuum at which translation, working within the structures of exegetical service, becomes full-fledged rhetorical appropriation, and thereby asserts its own canonical authority.<sup>14</sup>

Gower, moreover, not only 'translates' directly from original sources, that is, classical *auctores* like Ovid, but also 'translates' from other vernacular 'translations' of these *auctores*, such as the *Ovide moralisé* or Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see especially pp. 93–97.

<sup>11</sup> See Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation*, pp. 5 and 185, for cautionary statements about her arguments.

<sup>12</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, pp. 5 and 185.

<sup>13</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, p. 203.

If Gower's *Confessio*, when considered in relation to its sources, can be considered a 'secondary' form of translation, what about the two translations of the *Confessio* itself? Although we do not know the exact relationship between the two translations, nor between Gower's text and the Portuguese translation, we can safely state that both are primary, not secondary, nor literal, translations of their source texts. The Castilian text includes an explicit statement by the translator about the status of the text as translation. Juan de Cuenca notes the following at the beginning of his text:

[E]ste libro es llamado confisyón del amante el qual compuso Joan Goer, natural del reyno de Ynglaterra, et fue tornado en lenguaje portogués por Ruberto Paym natural del dicho reyno et canónigo de la çibdad de Lixboa. Et después fue sacado en lenguaje castellano por Joan de Cuenca, vesjno de la çibdad de Huete.<sup>16</sup>

(This book is called *Confysion del amante*, which John Gower, native of the kingdom of England, composed, and it was turned into the Portuguese language by Robert Payn, native of said kingdom and canon of the city of Lisbon. And afterwards it was turned into the Castilian language by Juan de Cuenca, inhabitant of the city of Huete.)

Juan de Cuenca notes that Gower's book was first 'turned into' Portuguese by Robert Payn and afterwards by himself into Castilian. This comment as well as the 'lusitanismos' — or words that seem directly transposed from the Portuguese — in his translation have led most critics to believe, probably correctly, that Juan de Cuenca translated from the Portuguese translation, not from the Middle English original.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> John Gower: *Confesión del Amante*, p. 141. All quotations from Juan de Cuenca's translation come from Alvar's edition. This edition contains a few flaws and the editor has made some questionable choices, as noted by critics. Both the flaws and the editor's questionable choices have to do generally with spelling conventions and changes that modernize the text. With a few exceptions they do not affect the meaning of the text. I have not been able to check the original manuscript but have been able to check all quotations from Alvar's text that I use in this essay against other transcriptions by scholars and have noted no significant discrepancies beyond spelling conventions. All translations from Juan de Cuenca's text are mine.

<sup>17</sup> See, especially, Karl Pietsch, 'Zur Frage nach der portugiesischen Übersetzung von Gowers *Confessio Amantis*', pp. 323–27, and 'Zum Texte der *Confision del Amante* por Joan Goer', pp. 428–44; Santano Moreno, *Estudio sobre 'Confessio Amantis'*, p. 35, Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity', pp. 483–84. Alternatively, Emilio Lorenzo, 'La primera traducción del inglés', has argued that the 'lusitanismos' in the Castilian translation can simply be explained by the influence of the Galician-Portuguese lyric on Castilian writings of the time; to Lorenzo what is more surprising is that, if Juan de Cuenca did translate from the Portuguese, there are so few 'lusitanismos' in the Castilian translation (pp. 358–59).

The recently discovered Portuguese translation has no prefatory comment that might signal its relation to Gower's Middle English poem. This, according to some critics, might be due to the loss of at least one initial folio.<sup>18</sup> The only information we have about the production of the text is a colophon by João Barroso in which he says that he wrote ('screueo') the book at the command of Dom Fernando de Castro.<sup>19</sup> It seems, moreover, that Barroso, who boasts that he wrote the book in forty days, was only a copyist and not a translator. Whichever text Barroso worked with, his copy includes changes, additions, and deletions vis-à-vis Gower's that suggest that the translator saw himself as a primary, not a literal, translator. Which text Juan de Cuenca based his translation on, whether it was the same as Barroso's or another one, is not clear at this point. Yeager has argued that 'at least two types of Portuguese translation may have been in circulation. Barroso replicated one; Juan de Cuenca relied on the other.'<sup>20</sup> Part of the reason Yeager makes this argument is that there are many differences between the two texts. However, if we consider the likelihood that neither the Portuguese nor the Castilian translator saw his aim as providing a literal translation of his source text, then it is possible that Juan de Cuenca, as translator, and Barroso, as copyist, had the same source text, but the Castilian translator felt free to make some changes to his Portuguese text in the same way that the Portuguese translator (probably Robert Payn) had felt free to rework Gower's text. Like Gower himself does, although in a primary rather than in a secondary sense, the translators departed from their source texts.<sup>21</sup> They did not translate literally, thus blurring the line between author, translator, and compiler.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Cortijo, 'La traducción portuguesa', p. 459, and Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity', p. 487 n. 18.

<sup>19</sup> This colophon can be seen in Antonio Cortijo Ocaña and Maria do Carmo Correia, *Confessio Amantis*, in *eHumanista*. All quotations from the Portuguese text are from this online edition. All translations from the Portuguese are mine.

<sup>20</sup> Yeager, 'Gower's Lancastrian Affinity', p. 487. Antonio Cortijo Ocaña ('Introduction', in *Texto y Concordancias de Indices Castellanos de la traducción portuguesa de la 'Confessio Amantis' de John Gower, Palacio II-3088*, ed. by Cortijo Ocaña (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1997), p. 5) also notes that several copies of the Portuguese translation seem to have circulated.

<sup>21</sup> For studies of general differences between the Castilian translation and Gower's whole poem, see Santano Moreno, *Estudio sobre 'Confessio Amantis'*, and Hamm, 'A Critical Evaluation of the *Confisyon del Amante*' as well as 'An Analysis of the *Confisyon del Amante*, the Castilian Translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1975). No comparable studies about the Portuguese translation have been published yet.

<sup>22</sup> On this blurring of the line in medieval translations, a phrase I have borrowed from him, see Roger Ellis, 'Introduction', in *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation*

The Iberian translations of the ‘Tale of Tereus’ exemplify this kind of reworking. But let us consider first Gower’s own reworking, a more radical one, of Ovid’s version. The story of Tereus and Philomela is a story about rape, the rape of Philomela, but, as Patricia Klindienst Joplin argues in her now classic essay ‘The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours’, it is also a story about the exchange of women, the exchange of Procne between her father, Pandion, and Tereus, and about the links between the two: the rape and the exchange.<sup>23</sup> As Joplin argues, ‘the myth of Philomela [...] suggests that the difference between the generative rite (marriage) and the dangerous transgression (rape) is collapsing within the Greek imagination’; to Joplin, moreover, Ovid’s later version focuses on and analyses this collapse.<sup>24</sup> But the myth, I argue, also raises other crucial questions about the exchange of women, questions that can be seen in Ovid but are more clearly developed by Gower and his Iberian translators. When a daughter is exchanged, she is expected to leave her biological family and her identification with it and take on the identity of her husband’s family.<sup>25</sup> As Lynda Boose points out, ‘Unlike the son, [the daughter] is the temporary sojourner within her family, destined to seek legitimization and name outside its boundaries.’<sup>26</sup> The new wife is expected to adopt a new name and shift her loyalty from her father to her husband once she is exchanged. The basic plot of the story of Tereus, though, suggests that the process of exchange does not always (or frequently) result in a complete shift in loyalty, that is, it does not necessarily result in the daughter’s adoption of a radically new identity and the complete rejection of the former one. Progne’s revenge of her sister’s rape by killing her own son and serving him to her husband suggests that she has not completely changed her loyalty. Hence, at its most basic plot level, the story asks, can the woman simply leave her father’s house and adopt a completely new identity? After she marries, does a tension remain between loyalty to her husband and loyalty to her biological family? In other words, is the

*in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), p. 5. See also Tim William Machan’s study of Chaucer’s own blurring of the line in ‘Chaucer as Translator’, *ibid.*, pp. 55–67.

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Klindienst Joplin, ‘The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours’, *Stanford Literary Review*, 1 (1984), 25–53.

<sup>24</sup> Klindienst Joplin, ‘Voice’, p. 41.

<sup>25</sup> On the daughter’s movement from the father’s house to the husband’s and on the question of her identity, see Lynda E. Boose, ‘The Father’s House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture’s Daughter-Father Relationship’, in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. by Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 19–74.

<sup>26</sup> Boose, ‘The Father’s House’, p. 21.

process of exchange more like an act of translation whereby the woman as text is adapted, or expected to adapt, to a new context (a family and/or a new culture and language), but ultimately still carries fundamental traces of her original context? These questions, implicit in most versions, are explored in greater depth by Gower and his translators than by Ovid.

Unlike Gower, Ovid frames the story politically and thus from the very beginning he draws a significant link between the exchange of women and the forging of political bonds between men. In Book XI he transitions into the story of Tereus by mentioning that Athens was attacked by foreign ('barbara'; l. 423) troops. Even though he was a foreigner himself, Tereus of Thrace decided to help King Pandion of Athens against his attackers and defeated them. This is the reason Pandion gives his daughter Procne to Tereus, turning her into a pawn in a political alliance between the two men. Pandion's aim in giving Procne to Tereus is to forge an alliance that will continue to ensure the protection of his city. However, as Joplin notes, the alliance turns out to be a self-destructive move for Pandion: 'The first exchange [Procne's] was meant to resolve the threat to Athens but instead brought on the invasion of the virginal daughter's body' and with this invasion the demise of Pandion and his power. The exogamous move was supposed to protect the family, but in fact ultimately destroyed it.<sup>27</sup>

Ovid's version suggests a father's fears: it points to the risks involved in exogamy and to the anxieties which the exchange of women raises from the perspective of the father — the mother is completely absent in his story.<sup>28</sup> The marriage of Procne is decided by the father and her exchange is depicted both as a political strategy and as a sign of Pandion's compliance with the laws of exogamy. Nevertheless, as Joplin points out, the spectre of father-daughter incest is raised in relation to the second daughter, Philomela. Notice how Ovid describes Tereus's reaction when he sees Pandion embrace Philomela in lines 477–82, particularly in 481–82: 'et quotiens amplectitur illa parentem, | esse parens vellet' (whenever she embraces her father he wishes he were in the father's place).<sup>29</sup> These lines hint at the similarities between the father-daughter bond and Tereus's sexual

<sup>27</sup> Joplin, 'Voice', p. 41. It should be noted that in Hyginus's version of the story in his *Fabulae*, after marrying Procne, Tereus returns to Pandion's house and he lies in telling him that Procne has died. He does so in order to marry Philomela. In this version then the emphasis is even more clearly on the exchange of women rather than on the rape, although the link between the two is still apparent. See Hyginus, *Fabulae*, ed. by P. K. Marshall (Leipzig: Teubner, 1993), pp. 54–55.

<sup>28</sup> Joplin, 'Voice'; see especially, pp. 31–43.

<sup>29</sup> See Joplin, 'Voice', p. 147. All quotations and translations from Ovid come from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. and trans. by Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1916), vol. 1.

desire. A similar parallel is drawn in line 499 when Pandion asks Tereus, in a tragically ironic moment: 'per superos oro patrio ut tuearis amore' (by the gods, I pray you guard her with a father's love). Tereus's actions eventually result in the blurring of familial lines that Pandion's compliance with the laws of exogamy was supposed to avert. Philomela herself notes this blurring of lines. After she is raped, she tells Tereus that he has confounded familial relationships: 'omnia turbasti; paelex ego facta sororis | tu geminus coniunx, hostis mihi debita Procne' (537–38) (you have confused all natural relations: I have become a concubine, my sister's rival; you, a husband to both. Now Procne must be my enemy).<sup>30</sup> Although Ovid does not explicitly portray this as incest, the blurring in this case points to Tereus's rape as a kind of incest.<sup>31</sup> More explicitly than Ovid, Martial in his epigram 'Luscinia' does classify the act as incest: 'Flet Philomela nefas incesti Tereos' (Philomela laments the crime of incestuous Tereus).<sup>32</sup> Pandion's compliance with exogamy turns out to be destructive rather than protective of his family. In fact, exogamy is shown to breed a kind of incest (incest between Tereus and his sister-in-law).

Unlike Ovid, who develops the theme of exogamy and the father-daughter bond, Gower's 'Tale of Tereus' makes the rape central to the story.<sup>33</sup> Genius tells the 'Tale of Tereus' as an example of 'ravine', or rape, robbery by violence, a subdivision of the sin of Avarice, which is the focus of Book V. As Carolyn Dinshaw has noted, 'The relation of rivalry between the barbarian and the Greek in the tale of Philomela that used women as objects of exchange [...] goes unremarked and certainly unanalyzed in Gower'.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in his version the war is conspicuously

<sup>30</sup> Joplin's analysis of these lines in 'The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours' is worth quoting here: 'Philomela experiences rape as a form of contagious pollution because it is both adultery and incest, the two cardinal transgressions of the rule of exogamy. Should the rule collapse altogether chaos would ensue. Then fathers (Pandion instead of Tereus) could have intercourse with daughters and brothers (Tereus as brother rather than brother-in-law with sisters)' (p. 41).

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), has recently included the rape of Philomela as an example of an incest story in classical literature (pp. 58–59).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted and translated by Wendy Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature* (New York: Lang, 1985), p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> For somewhat different analyses of the theme of rape in the story, see Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Rivalry, Rape and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1991), pp. 130–42, and Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 90–97.

<sup>34</sup> Dinshaw, 'Rivalry, Rape and Manhood', pp. 137–38.

absent and the marriage is presented as Pandion's way of advancing not his own interests but his daughter's: 'The fader of his pourveance | His daughter Progne wolde avance' (5563–64) and therefore married her to Tereus, a 'worthi king' (5566) and 'noble kniht' (5567). Gower, moreover, mentions the mother, Pandion's wife, from the very beginning and in most instances when the father is also mentioned (as noted before, the mother is absent in Ovid's version). In this way he avoids any suggestions of an exclusive father-daughter bond with his daughters that might draw attention to the theme of exchange between men and the spectre of father-daughter incest. It is thus significant that the lines in Ovid quoted above which refer to Tereus's envy of Pandion when the latter was embracing Philomela are not rendered by Gower. Neither does the Middle English poet convey Pandion's tears when he has to say goodbye to Philomela (495 and 505), nor his tragically ironic plea to Tereus that he treat Philomela like a father would in line 499, quoted above. In addition, Gower chooses to omit the moment in Ovid when Philomela accuses Tereus of confounding family relations (537–38). The only trace of this part of the speech in Gower's version is 'Hou hast thou holden thi beheste | Which thou unto my Soster madest?' (5678–79). Gower then downplays the suggestion that familial relations are confounded by Tereus's action and that, in a sense, the father's compliance with the laws of exogamy result in a kind of incest that destroys his family.

It seems surprising that Gower would have paid little attention to the question of exchange in the tale and that he would have avoided reflecting on the political implications it raises. Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, as I have argued elsewhere, is fundamentally concerned with the exchange of daughters.<sup>35</sup> Even as his father-daughter tales explore the ambiguities in the system of exchange and the blurring of the lines between incest and exogamy, the *Confessio* generally warns against father-daughter incest. The last and longest tale in the poem, the 'Tale of Apollonius' (VIII.271–2008), depicts father-daughter incest as a horrible and destructive crime. The story of Tereus, though, tells a different story about incest and exchange. The suggestion in Ovid's story that exogamy or father-daughter separation can breed another kind of incest would undermine Gower's overall emphasis on the destructiveness of father-daughter incest in the *Confessio Amantis* as a whole. As told by Ovid, the story of Tereus, in which a father's compliance with the law of exogamy brings about incest, complicates this picture. The political implications of the story, moreover, also complicate this picture. As is

<sup>35</sup> María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000).

characteristic of Gower's *Confessio*, the warning against incest in his father-daughter tales is inflected by political concerns.<sup>36</sup> His reflection on the laws of exchange and on father-daughter relations is also a reflection on kings' use of their power and on the need for kings to conform to the law.<sup>37</sup> Gower's interest in the political implications of his stories would lead one to expect that the political would play an important part in the 'Tale of Tereus', especially since those implications are clear in Ovid's version of the story. However, the suggestion in this tale that the king's compliance with the laws of exchange brings his own destruction complicates the links he draws between the system of exchange and good governance.

While taking the attention away from the political backdrop of the exchange between men and bringing the story closer to, as Bruce Harbert has put it, a 'domestic affair', Gower focuses on the rape and on Tereus's moral responsibility.<sup>38</sup> He also develops, more than Ovid does, the question of the exchanged daughter's loyalty and her identification with her birth family. Rather than exploring the father's bond with both his daughters, he focuses on Philomena's bonds with both her father and mother and, significantly, on the sisters' bonds with each other.<sup>39</sup> Several lines in Gower, with no parallel in Ovid, insist on the

<sup>36</sup> Numerous scholars have pointed to Gower's political concerns in his work. See, for instance, George Coffman, 'John Gower in his Most Significant Role', *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honor of George F. Reynolds*, University of Colorado, ser. B, 2.4 (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1945), pp. 52–61; John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964); Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm', *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 135–62; Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), chap. 7. More recently, in addition to Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, see Russell A. Peck, 'The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower: Ideas of Kingship and Real Kings', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 215–38.

<sup>37</sup> See Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*, pp. 17–29.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Harbert, 'The Myth of Tereus in Ovid and Gower', *Medium Aevum*, 41 (1972), 208–14, has observed that, unlike Ovid, who 'stresse[s] the almost superhuman grandeur of his characters', Gower brings the story closer to a 'domestic affair' by depicting his characters closer to ordinary people (p. 208).

<sup>39</sup> As Watt, *Amoral Gower*, has noted, the sense of connection and understanding between the two sisters in the 'Tale of Tereus' cannot be found in other stories about women, including sisters, in the *Confessio* (pp. 94–95).

identification between Progne and Philomena. For instance, in lines 5757–58 Gower notes that Philomena speaks to her sister in absentia ('ofte unto hir Soster diere | Hire herte spekth'); in her subsequent speech she assumes that as soon as Progne hears about the rape she will take revenge for her:

Ha, Soster, if ye knewe  
Of myn astat, ye wolde rewe,  
I trowe, and my deliverance  
Ye wolde schape and do vengance  
On him that is so fals a man.

(5759–63)

Note how Philomena does not take into consideration that the 'fals' man is Progne's own husband. Neither does Progne initially. As soon as she finds out about the rape and mutilation, she 'swerth, if that sche live mote, | It schal be venged otherwise' (5794–95). Only later on does she take into consideration that he is her husband and considers that he 'hadde his espousaile broke' (5815).

Gower portrays Philomena, Progne, and their parents as a close-knit family. By introducing Pandion's wife, he suggests a strong bond between Philomena and both of her parents, not only her father. Gower refers to Pandion's wife several times. Significantly, for instance, when Philomena is about to be raped, she cries out 'O fader, o mi moder diere, | Nou help!' (5635–36). The identification between Philomena and both of her parents contribute to the depiction of the events in the tale as a 'domestic affair' involving the whole family. The two sisters are also very close. As soon as she finds out about Philomena's rape in lines 5783–87, Progne immediately identifies with her and seeks revenge. This might not seem surprising given the horror of Tereus's crime. However, we should still note that Progne does not think for a moment about Tereus except in the context of revenge. There is no moment of hesitation and this suggests that her bond with Philomena is stronger than her bond with Tereus. Progne is no Griselda; her loyalty to him has limits and those limits have to do with her birth family. This lack of hesitation is also evident in Ovid's version, but my point is that in Gower's version, the lack of hesitation and Progne's subsequent actions are more insistently framed in terms of the stronger bonds between the sisters. Tereus's action tests the sister's bonds and Progne's immediate reaction shows that she chooses those bonds over the ones she has with him through their marriage.

Significantly, the two Iberian translations develop this identification even further than Gower, especially so in the case of the Castilian one. But before turning to an analysis of their different perspectives, we need to establish more

generally the extent to which the translations depart from Gower's tale. The differences between the three texts are not as great as those between Gower's and Ovid's versions, but each translation still diverges from Gower's version at some points. Sometimes they do so in the same way; oftentimes they each diverge from Gower's text differently. The Portuguese translation tends to follow Gower more closely than the Castilian does the Portuguese. The Castilian, for instance, compresses or omits some details in Gower that the Portuguese keeps. Thus, Progne's request to Tereus that he bring her sister to her is rendered partly as direct speech in Gower's version (5587–89 and 5593) and in the Portuguese translation (p. 119), but just as indirect speech in the Castilian translation (p. 461). Philomena's cry for help in lines 5635–36 is also rendered as direct speech in the Portuguese (p. 120) but not in the Castilian translation (p. 462). The Castilian also adds some details that cannot be found in either Gower's or the Portuguese versions. For instance, there is an intriguing detail in Juan de Cuenca's tale whose source I have not been able to identify. In both the English and the Portuguese versions, after raping Philomena and cutting off her tongue, Tereus puts her in prison; eventually, she finds a cloth that she embroiders with her message and finds a messenger who takes it to her sister. These versions follow Ovid closely — in Ovid she is guarded in a hut (573) and she has a servant take the embroidered tapestry to her sister. In the Castilian version, by contrast, Tereus leaves Philomena tied up on a hill. She is found by a beekeeper ('colmenero'), who realizes she is 'persona de lhnaje' (a person of high birth) and takes her to his house, where he lives with his wife and daughter. Eventually, Philomena has the beekeeper buy a white silken cloth and threads of diverse colours. She then has him take the cloth with her message to her sister.<sup>40</sup> Whether Juan de Cuenca's introduction of a beekeeper comes from a source or was his own invention — the beekeeper may be an allusion to the etymological meaning of the word *philomela*, love of honey — what becomes clear is that his translation is not a literal translation of the Portuguese text we have.<sup>41</sup> We should note, though, that

<sup>40</sup> The first known written Castilian version of the story of Philomela, Alfonso X's translation in *La General estoria*, specifies that Tereus leaves Philomela with a shepherd and his wife and lies to them about Philomela. See *Alfonso el Sabio: General estoria*, ed. by Antonio G. Solalinde, Lloyd A. Kasten, and Víctor R. B. Oelschläger, 2 vols (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1930–57), I, pt II, chap. 138. This is the version that is closest to Juan de Cuenca's but it does not mention a beekeeper. Neither do other known medieval versions, like the *Ovide moralisé* or Chrétien de Troyes's *Philomena*.

<sup>41</sup> I thank Suzanne Kocher for drawing my attention to the etymological meaning of *philomela*.

in some instances both translations differ from Gower's version in the same way. For example, at times, both render what are short direct speeches in Gower's version as indirect speeches (for instance, lines 5715 and 5792 are direct speeches in Gower, but are rendered indirectly in the translations), thus suggesting that the text Barroso copied and the one Juan de Cuenca translated may have been the same. In sum, neither version of the 'Tale of Tereus' is a literal translation of the Middle English text; moreover, the Castilian translation is not a literal translation of a copy of the extant Portuguese version, but such a copy may have been its source text.

Both the Castilian and the Portuguese versions follow Gower's lead in exploring the daughter's pull between her birth family and her conjugal family by foregrounding the familial bond between Philomena and her parents and the bond between Progne and her sister. And they do this exploration even more explicitly than Gower, especially in the case of the Castilian version. Moreover, unlike Gower's version, both translations invite a political reading of the tale, although their political concerns are different than Ovid's.

In the Castilian text the familial bond between Philomena and her parents is more important than in Gower's or the Portuguese versions. It is true that in the latter two there are two lines that reveal this bond which Juan de Cuenca does not translate because he compresses that particular moment. These are the lines quoted above, when Gower's Philomena cries out for her parents' help — 'O fader, o mi moder diere, | Nou help!' (5635–36). The Portuguese text translates this literally ('Oo padre, oo madre, acorreeme aquy!'). Juan de Cuenca reveals Philomena's anguish in indirect speech and does not mention her parents. Nevertheless, there are two mentions of Philomena's parents in Juan de Cuenca's text that are not in Gower's or the Portuguese versions. When Gower refers to the moment when Philomena has left her house with Tereus, he refers to it as 'Whan sche was fro hir frendes go' (5617), which the Portuguese translates almost literally, 'Depois que ela do poderio dos seus amigos foy partida' (p. 119) (after she left her friends' control). Juan de Cuenca, by contrast, stresses Philomena's filial bond: 'después que ella de poder de sus padres fue sallida' (p. 461) (after she left her parents' control). A few lines later Juan de Cuenca insists again on Philomena's filial bond by adding a question to Philomena's speech immediately after she is raped which brings it closer to Ovid. This question does not appear in either the Portuguese or Gower's text. Philomena asks Tereus, 'lo que a mj padre prometiste, ¿cómo lo manternás?' (what you promised my father, how are you going to keep it?). Juan de Cuenca thus emphasizes the familial bond to a greater degree than the Portuguese translator or Gower do.

The Portuguese and, especially, Juan de Cuenca's versions take the exploration of the bond between the sisters even further than Gower's version does. Like Ovid, both Iberian versions consider the way in which Tereus's rape of his sister-in-law confounds familial relations. When Tereus rapes Philomena, Gower writes that in his 'rage' Tereus forgot he was 'a wedded man' (5631). Both the Portuguese and the Castilian translations not only mention that he forgot he was married but they remind us that he was married to Philomena's sister ('nō lhe menbrando que era casado com sua jrmāa' (not remembering he was married to her sister; p. 120), says Barroso's text; 'non se le menbrando que hera casado con su hermana' (p. 462), Juan de Cuenca similarly points out). Thus the translations remind us that Tereus's crime is compounded not only because he was married, but because he was married to Philomena's sister. They also suggest that the rape is both an act of betrayal by Tereus toward his wife and an act through which he forces Philomena to betray her own sister. Tereus's betrayal is a double act of betrayal which also implicates Philomena. The reminder that Philomena is his sister-in-law both points to the incestuous character of the rape and emphasizes the importance of the familial bond between the sisters. In theory the rape makes enemies out of the sisters. However, their bond is stronger than the enmity theoretically created by the rape.

Both translations further explore this sisterly bond in other instances. In Juan de Cuenca's version after her tongue is cut off and she has been rescued by the beekeeper, when Philomena starts considering how she might communicate with her sister, she addresses her in absentia and calls what happened to her 'vuestra deshonra' (her sister's dishonour). The Middle English version refers to the rape as that 'which you toucheth and me bothe' (5768) and the Portuguese, following the Middle English closely, calls it 'cousa que tange a uos e a my' (p. 122). Although in the three versions she mentions afterwards her own dishonour, in Juan de Cuenca's, by calling the rape 'vuestra deshonra', Philomena for a moment seems to forget about herself and identify with Progne's plight more than with her own. The 'deshonra' is at least as serious for Progne as it is for Philomena. *Dishonour* is also the word used in the Castilian version to explain Progne's view of Tereus's act when she finds out about it by looking at the cloth: 'Mas, a la fyn, pensó que por su llorar poco rremedio rrecibía su hermana, e callóse jurando que sy Dios vida le diese que su desonrra sería bien vengada' (but, in the end, she realized that her crying would help her sister very little and she became quiet and swore that if God gave her life her dishonour would be avenged; p. 463). Whose dishonour is meant here is somewhat ambiguous. The pronoun *su* could refer to Philomena, to Progne, or to both. The Portuguese version in this case does

use the word *desonrra* (dishonour) and is thus close to the Castilian, even with regard to the ambiguity of the pronoun (*ssua* in this case): ‘Mas ē fym de todo cujdou en sseu entendimento como por fazer doo ou chorar todo o dia a sua jrmāa do sseu mal auerya pequeno cobro; e jurou que sse lhe deus stendesse os dias da ujda que a ssua desonrra seria bem byngada’ (but, in the end, she realized in her mind that being in pain and weeping the whole day about her sister would give little payment to her affliction; and she swore that if God extended her life she would take revenge on her dishonour; p. 123). Both are different than Gower’s, which is shorter at this point and does not mention the notion of dishonour:

Bot ate laste, ‘Of suche oultrages’,  
 Sche seith, ‘wepinge is noght the bote:’  
 And swerth, if that sche live mote,  
 It schal be venged otherwise.

(5792–95)

The word ‘oultrages’ here suggests excess or lack of moderation and thus points to Tereus, while ‘dishonour’ points to the effects of Tereus’s actions on the sisters.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the phrase itself, ‘suche oultrages’, lacks the personal pronoun and thus the more deeply personal connotation of ‘su desonrra’. Even though the type of dishonour they suffer is different in each case — Philomena’s dishonour comes from the loss of her virginity, Progne’s from her husband’s betrayal — in the translations the sisters are united through the notion of dishonour.

Juan de Cuenca makes other less obvious but even more significant changes that raise questions about Progne’s loyalty and show her lack of identification with her family by marriage. In killing Ithis, Progne forgets about what Juan de Cuenca’s and the text copied by Barroso portray as the natural love of a mother for her child (‘no mjrando al natural amor que madre deue a su hijo’ (not considering the natural love that a mother owes her son; p. 464) in the Castilian version; ‘nom parando mentes ao natural amor que madre deue teér a sseu filho’ (not considering the natural love that a mother should have for her son; p. 125) in the Portuguese version). This is rendered by Gower as an action ‘Withoutte insihte of moderhede’ (5893). The three versions make it clear that Progne can only see Ithis in terms of his father, not at all in terms of herself, that is, as her

<sup>42</sup> In the *MED*, *outrage* is defined first as ‘excess of food, drink [...] intemperance, immoderation’. Other meanings of the word include ‘wrongdoing, evil deeds’, ‘injury, harm’, ‘excessive pride’. Unlike ‘dishonour’ which points to the effect of Tereus’s crime on the sisters, ‘outrage’ can be read as referring to Tereus and the immoderation of his action as well as to the harm done to the sisters.

own son. But Progne's alienation from Tereus is stressed again by Juan de Cuenca later on. Having forgotten all 'piedad', Progne takes her revenge further in the Castilian version than in the other two versions. Gower and his Portuguese translator suggest that although Progne herself cooked the child and was present when Tereus was served, it was someone else who served him. In Juan de Cuenca's version, by contrast, it is Progne who serves him: 'e ella, por sý mesma, syruýa la mesa que no entraua otra persona en la cámara' (and she herself served the table, for no one else came into the chamber; p. 464). Her cruelty and Philomena's is further emphasized by noting that the sisters rubbed Tereus's face with Ithis's guts: 'asý salieron amas a dos e, puesta la cabeza delante, rrefregáronle la cara con las entrannas' (and so both came out and, putting the head in front of him, they rubbed his face with his guts; p. 465). In Gower's and the Portuguese versions, Philomena puts Ithis's head on two dishes and both sisters present it to Tereus. There is none of the ferocity we see in the Castilian. Juan de Cuenca then shows the identification between the two sisters and stresses their complete alienation from Tereus and everything/everyone that has to do with him. Writing about the Old French *Philomena*, E. Jane Burns has made the following observation: 'It is almost as if, in killing Itys, Progne unravels the threads of time, reversing the course of past events to return to a moment before the birth of her child, a moment perhaps even before her marriage.'<sup>43</sup> In this moment, Progne goes back to a time when her exclusive allegiance was with her birth family, thus choosing it above her family by marriage. This choice is noted by Gower and his Portuguese translator, but Juan de Cuenca emphasizes it.

When compared with Ovid's, Gower's version of the 'Tale of Tereus', I noted above, shows him trying to divest the story of political connotations. Juan de Cuenca's and the Portuguese versions, by contrast, do explore the political connotations of the story, although the connotations they examine are different than the ones suggested by Ovid's version. Both Iberian texts follow Gower in depicting the marriage of Progne as an advantageous event for the daughter rather than for the father. There is no sense that the marriage is a political exchange between two men in which the daughter is a mere object. There are no references either to the attacks against Athens. What the translations read politically is Tereus's

<sup>43</sup> E. Jane Burns, 'Raping Men: What's Motherhood Got to Do with It?', in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 127–60 (p. 151). Burns later argues that by killing her son Progne kills part of herself, but in doing so she claims her child as hers, not just Tereus's (pp. 151–52). Unlike Burns, I argue here that Progne can kill Ithis precisely because she does not see him as part of herself.

actions. As mentioned, Gower's Genius tells the 'Tale of Tereus' as an example of 'ravine', or rape, robbery by violence. In Middle English the word *ravine* did not have any obvious political connotations.<sup>44</sup> In the Castilian and Portuguese versions, though, the sin that the tale illustrates is called 'tiranya', that is, tyranny. Gower does call Tereus 'tirant' twice (5627 and 5646) and Progne refers to his 'tirannye' in line 5920. Nevertheless, these are the only allusions to Tereus's tyranny, in contrast to the numerous references to 'tyranya' in both translations. Both versions of the tale are preceded by a long discussion on the sin of 'tiranja', a primary, not literal, translation of lines 5505–50, in which Gower's Genius explains the sin of 'ravine' (not tyranny) prior to the story of Tereus. There are four other instances of the use of the word *tiranya* or *tirano* in each of the translations. Only one of the many references to the sin of 'tiranya' in both versions does point to the idea of robbery. In the heading to the tale the Portuguese text reads as follows: 'Aqui põe enxenplo contra aqueles que nas causas d'Amor sô tiranas' (here he gives an example against those who are tyrants in affairs of love; p. 118). Juan de Cuenca's heading explains, 'Que trata contra aquellos que, en las causas de amor, son tiranos e rrobadores' (Which deals against those who, in affairs of love, are tyrants and robbers; p. 461). We should note that even this one time when one of the translators mentions robbery ('rrobadores'), it appears coupled with tyranny. All other references to the sin in both versions call it 'tiranya'.

De-emphasizing again the story's political meaning, Gower plays down the fact that Tereus is a king. Genius introduces him as a king and knight ('A worthi king of hih lignage, | A noble kniht eke of his hond'; 5566–67) and so do the two translations. However, at the end, his identity as knight rather than king is the one that prevails in Gower's version. In the end Tereus is transformed into a 'lappewincke' (6041) with 'A creste [on his head] in tokne he was a kniht' (6044). The text copied by Barroso follows Gower literally at this point. Juan de Cuenca, by contrast, uses this moment to remind us that he was a king: 'E, porque fue rey, trae ençima de la cabeza vnas péndolas altas' (and because he was king, he carried on his head some high plumes; p. 466). Tereus's power, which he has abused, becomes ridiculous as it is represented by 'péndolas altas' on a lowly bird. Juan de Cuenca's version and, to a lesser extent, the Portuguese version both see Tereus's sin through a political lens that reminds us of the link between sexual abuse and

<sup>44</sup> The *MED* lists the following definitions for *ravine*: in addition to robbery, rapine, and rape, other meanings are greed, rapacity, stolen goods, booty, prey, voracity, force, and violence. None of these have obvious political connotations, although, of course, they could be used in a political context.

political abuse, even when Gower himself, who often draws this link in his *Confessio*, decides not to draw it in his version of the tale. While not necessarily blaming the father, as one might argue Ovid's version does, the translators, unlike Gower, point to the dangers of foreign political marriages by adding a political dimension to Tereus's sexual crime. The foreign son-in-law turns out to be a tyrant who destroys the daughters and ultimately the father's family. His sexual abuse is comparable to the abuses inflicted by a political tyrant. Taking this link in this tale much further than Gower does, both translations, in a sense, out-Gower Gower and, in doing so, speak to the risks of arranged political marriages between royal and aristocratic daughters and foreign rulers.

The story of Tereus is a story about two sisters, daughters of a king, about the marriage of one of them to a foreign king, and about the foreign king's rape of his sister-in-law and his destruction of the family as a result of gaining access to it. The story of the two translations of the *Confessio Amantis* is connected to the story of two sisters (in this case half-sisters), daughters of a duke who tried to become king, and to the story of the marriage of not one, but both of them to foreign kings. As far as we know, nothing as violent or tragic as what happened to Philomena and Progne ever happened to Philippa and Catherine. In fact, in both cases, it seems that the sisters did not have any critical or irreconcilable conflicts with their husbands and exerted some power and influence over them and their courts. It is not hard to imagine, though, that the kind of nightmare scenario and the questions raised by the 'Tale of Tereus' would have crossed the minds of the daughters and perhaps also of their father when their marriages were planned.

Until we know more about the circumstances surrounding the translations, we need to be cautious when drawing links between the translators of the *Confessio Amantis*, the person or persons who may have commissioned the translations, the texts, and their possible political aims. Nevertheless, we can still examine the ways in which the texts can help us understand the historical and political events to which the translations are most likely connected. The translations of the 'Tale of Tereus', whether intentionally or not, reveal some of the anxieties and fears that must have accompanied the marriages of Philippa and Catherine to foreign kings. Like Progne herself, and like many other royal and aristocratic daughters in the Middle Ages, both Philippa and Catherine were pawns in a complex political scheme.<sup>45</sup> John of Gaunt married Philippa to João I, hoping that an alliance with

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed analysis of John of Gaunt's ambitions and his involvement with Spain and Portugal, see P. E. Russell, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal at the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955).

João would further his ambition to become King of Castile. John of Gaunt himself had married the former Castilian king Pedro I's daughter, Constance, as part of his ambitious plan to be king, but when it became clear that his plan was not going to succeed, he married his daughter Catherine to the son of the then Castilian king, Juan I. Through this marriage he hoped that he might at least have some leverage over Castile and that his descendants would become kings. In this context, some of the questions asked by the 'Tale of Tereus' — for instance, what are the risks for a father when he opens his family to foreign kings by way of his daughters? — are questions that Gaunt may have asked himself when he planned and negotiated his daughters' marriages. Indeed, when he himself married King Pedro's daughter, he must have thought about the same question, although from the perspective of the son-in-law. His marriage was, of course, an attempt to open his way into Pedro I's family and thus into Castilian politics — a move on John of Gaunt's part which reminds us of Tereus.

Other questions raised by the tale would have resonated with his daughters and perhaps with John of Gaunt himself and the husbands. To what extent would the daughters adopt a completely new identity in the foreign countries and to what extent would they remain loyal to their old identity? How vulnerable would the daughters be in a foreign country?

An examination of the lives and actions of Philippa and Catherine in their new countries suggests that those questions were indeed important to them and to their father. As Joyce Coleman has recently shown, Philippa kept in contact with England and her family through letters and gifts.<sup>46</sup> In one of her letters, as Coleman puts it, 'she may have reflected some feelings of homesickness: "Everyone who finds himself outside his own country", [Philippa] comments, "naturally wishes to return"'.<sup>47</sup> In addition to letters and gifts, Philippa, in Coleman's words, 'imported English liturgy, exempla, alabasters, architecture, and purses, spreading anglophilic across many levels of Portuguese society'. This policy, Coleman continues, was due to personal loyalty but also to 'her desire to bolster Anglo-Portuguese relations'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Catherine's focus as queen of Castile was to strengthen Castile's relations with England and Portugal.<sup>49</sup> As Ana Echevarría

<sup>46</sup> Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster', pp. 147–49.

<sup>47</sup> Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster', p. 147.

<sup>48</sup> Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster', p. 154.

<sup>49</sup> Ana Echevarría, 'Catalina of Lancaster, the Castilian Monarchy and Coexistence', in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict and Coexistence: Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, ed. by Roger Collins and Anthony Goodman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), especially pp. 92–97. See also,

argues, 'Catalina's relationship with the English Crown was to form an interesting counterpoint to the officially Francophile policies pursued since the accession of the Trastámaras, and may be regarded as a revival of her grandfather Pedro I's anglophilic policy.'<sup>50</sup> Although the relationship between Portugal and Castile was even more complex, Catherine also made constant efforts to mediate between the two kingdoms.<sup>51</sup> Both sisters thus kept in contact with each other and with their 'fatherland'. Such contacts must have had something to do with personal feelings such as homesickness. But strengthening the political ties among Castile, Portugal, and England and thus strengthening their familial bonds also seems like a conscious, self-protective strategy. Cultivating these strong bonds would help ensure that if something went very wrong in their adoptive kingdoms, their birth family would come to their aid.

The promotion of political and cultural ties between Catherine and Philippa, or Castile and Portugal, on the one hand, and between them and England, on the other, are strong indications that the commission of the translations of the Middle English *Confessio Amantis* into Portuguese and Castilian must have had to do with these daughters. The translations would have strengthened the links between the three kingdoms and between the sisters and their biological family. We should still ask ourselves, though, why the particular Middle English work that was translated was Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. If, as the evidence strongly points out, the translations were commissioned by them or by someone who saw himself/herself as responding to their wishes, I would like to suggest two important reasons why the daughters would have been particularly interested in Gower's poem *per se* and in having it translated.<sup>52</sup>

The first reason takes us back to the 'Tale of Tereus'. Many of the tales in the *Confessio* have strong women characters and, as Watt has recently argued, Gower depicts women with the kind of psychological complexity that he also uses to depict men.<sup>53</sup> In addition, many of the tales with female characters are tales about

more recently, Ana Echevarría-Arsuaga, 'The Queen and the Master: Catalina of Lancaster and the Military Orders', *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed. by Theresa Earenfight (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 91–105.

<sup>50</sup> Echevarría, 'Catalina of Lancaster', p. 92.

<sup>51</sup> Echevarría, 'Catalina of Lancaster', pp. 94–95.

<sup>52</sup> Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster', has mentioned an additional reason with regard to Philippa: the *Confessio* has a mix of 'lust' and 'lore' that, given what we know about her, would have fit well with her tastes (p. 155).

<sup>53</sup> See Diane Watt, 'Gender and Sexuality in *Confessio Amantis*', in *A Companion to Gower* (see n. 36, above), pp. 197–213.

daughters of male rulers.<sup>54</sup> Such tales would have been particularly interesting to the two daughters of a nobleman who wanted to become king. The 'Tale of Tereus', especially, exemplifies the kind of resonance that Gower's tales could have for these foreign queens. It is revealing that, intentionally or not, the tale was translated in a way that it became more clearly a story about the dangers of foreign political marriages, what we might call an extreme form of exogamy, and also about the bond between two sisters and their ability to help each other. The 'Tale of Tereus' expresses what may have been the historical sisters' fears and highlights the importance of strengthening their bonds with each other and with their biological families. In addition, it can also be read as a warning to those kings who might be tempted to act tyrannically toward their foreign wives, a warning that would have served Philippa and Catherine well.

The second reason why these foreign queens would have been interested in the *Confessio* has to do with their roles as queens. Critics have long noted that the *Confessio* explores Gower's ideas about governance and kingship and that through it Gower addresses contemporary rulers. In addition to the many tales that centre on rulers, Book VII of the *Confessio* is a kind of mirror for princes. Moreover, the first recension of the poem and some of the manuscripts of the second recension are dedicated to a king, Richard II, while some of the second-recension manuscripts and all the third-recension ones are dedicated to Henry of Lancaster.<sup>55</sup> What critics do not usually notice is that many of the same stories and political lessons would have been relevant to female rulers as well. It was not unusual for a queen in the Middle Ages to become regent during her son's minority or even in some rarer cases to be queen during her own husband's minority. Catherine is a striking example of the latter and former situations. When she married Enrique in 1388 Catherine was sixteen and Enrique nine years old. Enrique's father, Juan I, died in 1390 when Enrique was still only eleven years old. Catherine was not named regent at that point; a Regency Council was appointed and it is unclear what her role was vis-à-vis the Regency Council. Nevertheless, Echevarría points out, as a queen married to a husband who was not an adult yet, Catherine still had to make some decisions — during the years of her husband's minority, for instance, she was pressured to acknowledge the Avignon papacy.<sup>56</sup> Eventually,

<sup>54</sup> See Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters*.

<sup>55</sup> For a recent analysis of the manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*, see Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', in *A Companion to Gower* (see n. 36, above), pp. 73–97.

<sup>56</sup> Echevarría, 'Catalina of Lancaster', p. 85.

Enrique became king. However, he died young while their male heir was still a child. At that point, during the minority of her son, Catherine did become actual queen regent and was responsible for governing Castile. Her half-sister, Philippa, never found herself in a similar situation, but it is interesting to note that João seems to have seen her as an intellectual equal, someone he could consult with on a great variety of matters.<sup>57</sup> It thus seems that she was also prepared to play a stronger role as queen, if needed. Catherine's capacity to rule as queen regent and Philippa's intellectual preparedness as partner of a king must have been guided by some important books. Could the *Confessio Amantis* have been one of them, we should ask? If so, is it possible that Philippa and Catherine had the translations made so that the ideas debated in the *Confessio* which shaped their thinking on governance would have exerted some influence in their own courts? We may never know the exact answers to these questions, but the larger point I am trying to make is still worth noting. If the *Confessio Amantis* can be seen as a kind of mirror for princes, there is reason to believe that it may have worked also as a kind of mirror for princesses. And reading it with such a likely possibility in mind can lead to some new and fruitful interpretations of the tales and the poem as a whole.

In *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Luise von Flotow remarks that '[p]olitics, in the widest sense of the term, and translation are activities that have always been linked', but, traditionally, the compartmentalization of disciplines according to national literatures has marginalized the study of translations and of their political implications.<sup>58</sup> The study of the political translation of women between nations has also traditionally possessed the status of a marginal scholarly pursuit. Although this is now being corrected by much current work, one reason for this marginalization is obviously the traditional lack of attention paid to women. Another reason is the compartmentalization of disciplines, mentioned by von Flotow, along national borders — medievalist scholars of England seldom venture into Iberia and vice versa. Only by challenging such disciplinary and national borders can we hope to understand, first, the translation of texts and their political implications, second, the translation of women and their political implications, and, third, as in the case of the translations of the 'Tale of Tereus', the relations between the two, translated women and translated texts.

<sup>57</sup> See Coleman, 'Philippa of Lancaster', pp. 144–45 and 149–51.

<sup>58</sup> Luise von Flotow, 'Translation in the Politics of Culture', *The Politics of Translation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Luise von Flotow, and Daniel Russell (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001), p. 9.

## Rhetoric and Authority



## GOWER'S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*, NATURAL MORALITY, AND VERNACULAR ETHICS

J. Allan Mitchell

**B**ecause of their restricted focus even the best modern accounts of medieval moral thought give a partial and distorted impression, especially pertaining to ethical justification. The shortcomings of the leading studies arguably have much to do with what is (or rather, *is not*) admitted as philosophically significant in the field of ethics, for indeed modern scholars tend to draw their examples from university debates and tractates without taking into their purview literary works, sermon collections, confessional manuals and various other — especially vernacular or demotic — sources.<sup>1</sup> What view prevails as a result? The issue can be framed with reference to the legacy of Aristotelian ethics, chosen here for its particular bearing on Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,<sup>2</sup> a poem that exhibits a serious philosophical interest in a form of ethical pragmatism that is regularly overlooked in conventional accounts of medieval morals. A rudimentary sketch of the prevailing view against which the poet's practical reason must be set runs

<sup>1</sup> One only has to think of the important studies of Étienne Gilson or Frederick Copleston, but I also have in mind more recent histories of moral philosophy such as Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd edn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), and *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); John Marenbon's *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150–1350): An Introduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1992); and J. B. Schneewind's *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle looms large in the seventh book of the *Confessio Amantis*, a book sometimes treated as though it were conceptually incongruous with the rest of the work. But as Georgiana Donavin's essay in the present volume shows, the seventh book makes explicit the neo-Aristotelian theoretical, rhetorical, and political ideals that go to inform the larger ethical project that is the *Confessio*.

as follows: in their Christianization of antique ethics the medieval schoolmen, preferring one or another type of moral metaphysics, dropped from their theories Aristotle's original grounding of practical deliberation (*phronesis*) in both commonplaces (*endoxa*, opinions that are probable or generally admitted) and inductive judgement (*paradigma*, reasoning from particular cases). True, Aristotle's ethics was heavily qualified by his medieval commentators and synthesizers, for whom Aristotelian (or what was equally known as Ciceronian) practical reason had to be assimilated to some version of Augustinian eternal law.<sup>3</sup> Under the pressure exerted by Augustine, then, dogmatic and deontic accounts of natural law and right reason followed in order to compensate for the perceived lack of determinacy and transparency in the ancient understanding of practical reason.<sup>4</sup> So, for example, whereas the good life used to be grounded in virtues acquired by means of circumspection and habituation, now it would be imperfect without the infused virtues (i.e., the three theological virtues of grace, hope, and charity). The scholastic tradition in which these sorts of accommodation were being sought attempted to give moral agents clear natural or supernatural justification so that

<sup>3</sup> For brief surveys of the medieval reception of Aristotle see Bernard G. Dod's 'Aristoteles latinus' and C. H. Lohr's 'The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Norman Kretzmann and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Thomist philosophy is representative for having introduced what H. V. Jaffa calls 'divinely implanted' natural law into the ethical theory of Aristotle. For discussions of the signal differences see H. V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism: A Study of the Commentary by Thomas Aquinas on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 187; P. Mercken, 'Transformations of the Ethics of Aristotle in the Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas', *Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario: Atti del Congresso Internazionale* (Naples: Edizioni domenicane italiane, 1974), pp. 160–61; and R.-A. Gauthier and J. Y. Jolif, *Aristote: L'Éthique à Nicomaque* (Leuven: Peeters, 1970). Daniel Westberg's *Right Practical Reason: Aristotle, Action, and Prudence in Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 26–30, surveys the critical opinion which was popularized by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, p. 278. Oscar J. Brown in *Natural Rectitude and Divine Law in Aquinas* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), p. 63, describes Aristotelian ethics as a "socialization" of moral science' that Aquinas had to modify. On Augustine's 'eternal law' and his own firming up of moral principles see John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 191–99. On the Thomist synthesis Westberg asks: 'How is it that Aquinas can seem so Aristotelian in his description of human action and yet be so Augustinian in his insistence on the need for conformity to the eternal law?' (p. 34); see further pp. 95–100 for discussion of the stimulus to neo-Platonize Aristotle in Augustine, Albert the Great, and Bonaventure.

<sup>4</sup> For example, D. J. M. Bradley's *Aquinas and the Twofold Human Good: Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas's Moral Science* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997) argues that the philosopher developed natural law theory to 'stabilize the foundations of Aristotelian practical wisdom' (p. xii).

actions could conform themselves to the precepts of natural law (if you are an Aquinas) or the intuition or revelation of divine prerogative (if you are a Duns Scotus or Ockham).<sup>5</sup> But those attempted syntheses reflect only one type of interest in ethics and its moral foundations, one that is decidedly academic and ecclesiastic, and that is situated within the confines of narrow disciplinary regimes with all their attendant prejudices. Indeed the customary privileging of a metaphysical foundation in medieval ethical theory is matched by its clerical Latinity — that is, the way it is correspondingly rarefied, exclusive, and universalist in its linguistic orientation — as if corroborating its claims to normativity in the sphere of ethics.

Gower's *Confessio Amantis* is a distinguished alternative (we might say, interdisciplinary) example of serious philosophical and ethical reflection not just because it is done in verse and predominantly in the vernacular; the work also vernacularizes ethics for an emerging English polity. I will argue that one valuable contribution the poet makes consists in his investigation into heterogeneous sources of moral justification, sources that are less specialized and numinous than those on offer in scholastic theory. Consequently, prevailing views of the normativity and naturalism of the Latin philosophical tradition require some adjustment. Comparatively speaking, the ethical eclecticism exhibited in Gower's *Confessio* gives us another way to conceive of the possibilities of medieval moral thought. As I have discussed elsewhere, Gower opens ethics up to the *sensis communis*, or what the poet thinks should be a common sense educated in the humanities, and he is characteristically rhetorical rather than metaphysical in his orientation towards ethics.<sup>6</sup> My analysis will be extended to explore the way Gower's long poem diffuses ethics 'in the vernacular'. Gower's express purpose is clarified in a revised version of his *Confessio* —

And for that fewe men endite  
In oure englissh, I thenke make  
A bok for Engelondes sake  
(Prol.22–24)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On the differences between Thomism and Ockhamist ethics in the fourteenth century see Frederick Charles Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols (London: Search Press, 1946–75), especially III, 96–110. I make further reference to Scotus and Ockham below.

<sup>6</sup> J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), especially pp. 36–78.

<sup>7</sup> *The English Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, Early English Text Society, o.s., 81–82, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1900–01; repr. 1979); all citations of the *Confessio Amantis* are from this edition.

and so it stands to reason that his ethical approach will be conditioned at a most fundamental level by the poem's vulgar Englishness. Equally, the rhetorical nature of the poem must remain paramount in thinking about how Gower employs the common tongue to identify and convey commonplaces. As others before me have observed, Gower uses exemplary rhetoric in the *Confessio* in a way that comports well with Aristotle's rooting of ethics and politics in the particular case.<sup>8</sup> I wish to rejoin the discussion by considering what I call the poem's vernacular ethics, not to argue that Gower ignores normative theory but to show how he engages it as one among other rhetorical reasons (or cases) for action and thought.

Gower's *Confessio Amantis* could be said to stage a debate about natural morality, for it is widely recognized that *kynde* is one of the most morally ambiguous terms in the work. What could bear further scrutiny is the way any natural justification for ethics is inevitably conditioned by the poet's preferred means of expression — for indeed, *kynde* is not just ambiguous, the term is also vernacular English. However much critics disagree over the concordance between nature and morality, they have not stopped to consider the way the debate is inscribed in the *Confessio*.

Kurt Olsson, who has given sustained attention to the nature nomenclature, argues that of the five main senses attaching to *kynde* one nature emerges as an ethical principle regulating the others in the *Confessio*: in essence Olsson's view is that for Gower moral excellence consists in subordinating our lower animal nature to a higher *jus naturae*, or natural reason.<sup>9</sup> Hugh White agrees that the language is equivocal and often ethically antithetical but reaches a much more melancholy conclusion about human reason: for him there is no escaping the stark division between a morally benign nature and an amoral (sometimes downright immoral) nature. Gower's poem is at an impasse on this point. On the one hand, as this critic points out, nature stands for a moral order out of which good behaviour springs and according to which conflict is naturally resolved; on the other, it is presented as an irrational and amoral (occasionally immoral) impulse humans

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Charles Runacres, 'Art and Ethics in the "Exempla" of *Confessio Amantis*', in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 106–34; William Robins, 'Romance, Exemplum, and the Subject of the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 19 (1997), 157–81. Also see Georgiana Donavin's treatment of Gower's Aristotelian rhetorical theory in the present volume.

<sup>9</sup> Kurt Olsson, 'Natural Law and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 11 (1982), 229–61. For a wider discussion of medieval *kyndes* see Peggy A. Knapp, *Time-Bound Words: Semantic and Social Economies from Chaucer's England to Shakespeare's* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 80–89.

share with the animals.<sup>10</sup> White's analysis is the more persuasive to my mind, given the preponderance of evidence on his side within the *Confessio Amantis*, but the critical difference lies elsewhere: both critics concede more to natural morality than Gower ever does, especially given the self-conscious way in which he writes nature into the work.

That humans possess a natural inclination towards what is good is a view long associated with St Paul's comment about the Gentiles 'who have not the law' but 'do by nature those things that are of the law', because they have 'the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them; and their thoughts between themselves accusing or defending one another' (Cum enim gentes, quae legem non habent, naturaliter ea, quae legis sunt, faciunt, eiusmodi legem non habentes, ipsi sibi sunt lex: qui ostendunt opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis, testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum, et inter se invicem cogitationibus accusantibus, aut etiam defendantibus; Romans 2.14–15).<sup>11</sup> The notion is elucidated in any number of later medieval philosophical or legal texts, and famously stretches back to Augustine. For Alain de Lille humans are in possession of a *naturalis ratio*, for Bonaventure they are aided by *naturale lumen*, while Peter Lombard observes that they are moved *naturaliter velle bonum*. Aquinas echoes the Pauline dictum in stating that the first principles of ethics are written in natural reason, *scripta in ratio naturali*.<sup>12</sup> In the mainline philosophical tradition, then, plainly much stock was put in natural morality: an immutable and normative nature is variously cited as a stimulus to love, the ground of reason, the origin of shame, and basis of the Old Testament Decalogue and the New Testament commandments of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

There is much evidence of natural law in the *Confessio Amantis*. The important question has long been whether Gower expresses much confidence in it as a basic moral order, impulse, principle, or outcome. Olsson and White both think

<sup>10</sup> Hugh White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> All quotations from the Bible are taken from the Vulgate, using *Biblica Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. by Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, 4th edn, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 14.1 (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1965); with translations from *The Holy Bible: Douay Version Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (London: Clowes, 1956).

<sup>12</sup> For a historical survey see D. E. Luscombe's 'Natural Morality and Natural Law', in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (see n. 3, above), pp. 705–19. The following examples are drawn from White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, pp. 8–20.

<sup>13</sup> Westberg, *Right Practical Reason*, p. 101.

Gower affirms the existence of natural morality, however opaque or insufficient it may be in the ultimate scheme of things. For the latter critic nature is simply less likely to guarantee ethical results, but both agree that there *is* a natural moral order subtending ethics. Apparently in support of this view Gower speaks of the *unkynde* behaviour of murderers which nature repays in kind (e.g., III.2055–69; V.5901–06; VIII.213–22); the *kynde* nature of love (e.g., V.119; VII.4297–98); the vices which are avowedly ‘to kinde no plesance’ (e.g., III.5–12; V.120–24); and the poet plays on the word *kynde* when he wants it to do triple-duty as a simultaneous description of some particular action, its intrinsic nature or species, and finally its relationship to humankind, for example in the droll and apparently circular statement, ‘It is al on to say unkinde [i.e., both callous and unnatural] | As thing which don is ayein kinde, | For it with kinde never stod a man to yelden evel for good’ (v.4923–25). There are many other instances, but one established interpretation seems to be that at least one nature is as spontaneous and transparent as an Augustinian ‘lawe of kinde’. As mentioned, however, other complications besides ambiguity and multiplicity enter into Gower’s treatment of natural morality in the *Confessio*. For nature is not only a fraught concept by virtue of its conflation and contiguity with other *kindes*, making it difficult to see how they are consistent; nature is also destined to remain a tangle of derivative interpretations and examples. For one thing, Gower does not follow the examples of Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, Chaucer, or Langland in creating an individualized, personified *Natura* or *Kynde* who speaks directly on its own behalf as the custodian of natural morality. As Russell Peck has observed, nature here is ‘never given a direct voice, never even placed in the reassuring position of God’s servant, as in Chaucer’.<sup>14</sup> Gower’s language of natural morality is thoroughly mediated, diffuse, divergent, and refractory; and as a common noun (not a proper name) it is never independent of the specific pressures of the narratives in which it is employed in the *Confessio Amantis*. But it is not just that nature is subject to the impersonations of the text and occurs only within the imagined communicative situation of the

<sup>14</sup> John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway, 3 vols, TEAMS, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000–05), II, 14. Nor is Genius related as closely as he has been in previous literary incarnations to Nature. As Winthrop Wetherbee observes Genius has ‘become a spokesman for cultural, as well as natural, values’; see his ‘John Gower’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 601. On the background see George D. Economou, ‘The Character Genius in Alan de Lille, Jean de Meun, and John Gower’, *Chaucer Review*, 4 (1970), 203–10.

work—that is, the fictional confession of Amans. Still more significantly, Gower has marked *kinde*, in cases where it is employed as a normative principle or term, as having been first inscribed in clerical discourse.

Returning to consider the literary context of the previous examples, the problem quickly becomes apparent. Genius's statement about the nature of envy is prefaced thus:

For thus the *wise clerkes telle*,  
 That no spirit bot of malice  
 Be weie of *kinde* upon a vice  
 Is tempted, and be such a weie  
 Envie hath *kinde* put aweie  
 And of malice hath his steringe

(ll.3136–41; emphasis added)

Genius describes avarice in the following bookish terms:

Bot, *so as every bok recordeth*,  
 It is to *kinde* no plesance  
 That man above his sustienance  
 Unto the gold schal serve and bowe,  
 For that mai no reson avowe.

(v.120–24; emphasis added)

Similarly, he prefaces the punning lines mentioned earlier about the 'unkinde man' who violates the law of 'kinde' with the following candid acknowledgment: 'The bokes speken of this vice' (V.4917). To take one more example,

For *who that wolde ensample take*,  
 The lawe which is naturel  
 Be weie of *kinde* scheweth wel  
 That homicide in no degree,  
 Which werreth ayein charite,  
 Among the men ne scholde duele.  
 For *after that the bokes telle*,  
 To seche in al this worldesriche,  
 Men schal noght finde upon his liche  
 A beste forto take his preie:  
 And sithen *kinde* hath such a weie,  
 Thanne is it wonder a man,  
 Which *kynde* hath and resoun can,

That he wol owther more or lasse  
 His kinde and resoun overpasse,  
 And sle that is to him semblable.

(III.2580–95; emphasis added)

Genius not only invokes an exemplary narrative drawn from tradition to support his case, but he also refers his knowledge of animal behaviour to books. Obviously what makes these repeated appeals to a literary and scholarly activity so important is that Genius is taking his knowledge of natural phenomena from the ambient culture (i.e., written culture), so that one is tempted to ask why he did not just go outside and observe nature for himself. More to the point, if natural reason has such primacy and transparency in moral matters, then presumably no one need depend on learned writings to discover it; *naturale lumen* should have sufficed. If there is a natural morality, in other words, Gower's grasp of it emphatically does not come naturally, and he insists upon that fact.

Gower gives new meaning to the biblical and philosophical notion that the law is *written*, though it is here not inscribed on the heart; or if it is so inscribed, then it is first of all written in books and now in 'oure englisch'. The impression we are left with is that the 'lawe of kinde' is encrypted as a cultural phenomenon — as '*wise clerkes telle*' and '*every bok recordeth*' — not at all naturally occurring or even universally recognized or intuitively acquired. But Gower is hardly being ironical or cavalier on this point, for he persists in translating natural morality to his readers in his own book. The results are paradoxical but not, so far as the poet's express purposes are concerned, impractical. Having identified the scholarly milieu from which natural morality derives the poet has performed the ambidextrous task of assigning it a social and linguistic origin while redeploying it in a new social and linguistic context. Several scholars have observed that Gower vernacularizes clerical tradition or, what is much the same thing, clericalizes the vernacular. The point needs to be elaborated further in relation to other examples, but what could bear specific emphasis here is that in appealing to the textuality of clerical authority, Gower in effect denaturalizes it; and rather than simply subverting the normative conditions of the theory of natural law thereby (as if that were his purpose), Gower seems to think he is better off reappropriating the theory to a shared cultural space. He is expanding its field of application and speculation, as he indicates in the Prologue, 'for Engelondes sake', making it accessible and viable in a way that his major earlier writings in French (*Mirour de l'Omme*) and Latin (*Vox Clamantis*) never could.

Gower's referral of nature to culture is consistent with his general attitude towards learning and with his self-confessed appropriation of clerical culture for

common profit. He begins the *Confessio Amantis* by reflecting on his relation to past scholarship:

Of hem that written ous tofore  
The bokes duelle, and we therefore  
Ben tawht of that was write tho.  
(Prol.1–3)

Not a passive consumer of books, he promises to translate and transform them:

Forthi good is that we also  
In oure tyme among ous hiere  
Do wryte of newe som matiere  
(Prol.4–6)

An indication of his deep respect for old books is the fact that the poet feels he must acknowledge debts to them even when doing so threatens their very 'nature'. Others have described a similar dynamic in relation to Gower's language politics. Rita Copeland observes that he is participating in *translatio studii*, concerned as he is with elevating the authority of vernacular on the backs of the Latin *auctores*.<sup>15</sup> Larry Scanlon has argued that Gower's adoption of the role of vernacular transmitter has to do with the perceived failings of clerical culture; the poet is in effect substituting lay authority for an infirm Latinate tradition.<sup>16</sup> These critics focus on the poet's endeavour to challenge authority and tradition. However that may be, Gower's (or Genius's) habitual '*every bok recordeth*' and '*the wise clerkes telle*' makes the tradition pertain more widely, 'In oure tyme among ous hiere'. Much the same could be said about the way Gower's Latin interacts with English within the *Confessio*, for the bilingualism of the poem seizes on the opportunity to enact just the kind of cultural translation being describing here. The prestige language has no choice but to cede authority to the vernacular, since the Latin apparatus (verse prologues, prose glosses, speaker markers) depends on the English for its narrative and dialogic elaboration and justification, if not for a full translation (i.e., for readers who are not bilingual).<sup>17</sup> Others agree that there

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 7 of Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 251–52.

<sup>17</sup> Gower has taken unnecessary risks if what he wanted was to control the reception of his text, but see Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation*, pp. 202–05, for the view that the Latin apparatus exists to perform an 'auto-exegesis'. She ends up arguing that in fact the

is something in it for Gower to have the vernacular placed under the *prima facia* authority of the Latin. For example, Winthrop Wetherbee states that 'exemplary narratives challenge the authority of the penitential discourse and moralizing Latin glosses that frame them', and he goes on to speak of the vernacular 'exposing the evasions of the Latin the process of assimilating its concepts'.<sup>18</sup> Diane Watt suggests that in his guise as an English writer Gower is 'concerned with creating a new vernacular authority'.<sup>19</sup> I suggest he is authorizing a kind of vernacular ethics.

Natural morality is an 'assimilated concept' that will not maintain a condition of unqualified normativity when translated into the vernacular, and therefore the authority Gower asserts is in some way transformed in the asserting of it. In fact, natural law becomes another piece of moral rhetoric disposed among all the other examples in the *Confessio*. Gower defines the miscellaneous poem as 'ex floribus recollectum' (Prol.40\*), and if ever there is any kind of natural morality in it, then it must be found in this cultured aspect of the moral work: the vegetal analogy and the implied horticultural activity suggests an alternative conception of 'natural morality' rooted not in abstract norms but in new forms of vernacular culture drawn from diverse sources of inspiration. To describe these sources Gower uses terms such as *ensamples*, *remembrances*, *evidence*, *experience*, which the poet has grafted from biblical texts, classical mythology, chronicle history, philosophy

scholarly machinery enables the modest author to mask even as he mimics his authority. For reference to others besides Copeland who emphasize the fixative and limiting function of the Latin apparatus see Richard K. Emmerson, 'Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture: Latin and English in Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 143–86. I assume that English readers whom a coercive author might most want to keep in check are in fact free from its constraints. The Latin is in any case not very constraining, or always comprehensible. Siân Echard provides a salutary corrective to the view that Latin has privileged, hegemonic control: 'far from invoking authority, Gower's Latin problematizes the question of authority in the *Confessio* by presenting the reader with several competing authoritative voices, Latin and vernacular, none of which seem capable of taming the text' ('With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*', *Studies in Philology*, 95 (1998), 1–40 (p. 7)). See also Joyce Coleman, 'Lay Readers and Hard Latin: How Gower May have Intended the *Confessio Amantis* to Be Read', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 24 (2002), 209–35 (pp. 216–17, 227, 234–35).

<sup>18</sup> Wetherbee, 'John Gower', pp. 591 and 599. See also his 'Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer and the Boethian Tradition', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager (Victoria: University of Victoria, 1991), pp. 7–35.

<sup>19</sup> Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 29.

and proverbial lore. By cultivating this diverse heritage of *dicta et facta memoria-bilia* in the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower is attempting to establish a new common ground. He is finally less interested in the natural occurrence of 'a certain basic instinctual order'<sup>20</sup> than in cultivating an educated sensibility and training up a 'second nature'. More genuinely Aristotelian than the philosophers from whom he has learned, then, Gower locates human agency in something like *endoxa* stored up in the memory and other artefacts of the past.<sup>21</sup>

*Naturam superat doctrina*, Teaching conquers Nature.<sup>22</sup> Within the fiction of the poem it rapidly becomes apparent that for Gower ethics is not guaranteed by nature, but arises out of learning and circumspection. Genius undertakes to provide Amans with such rhetorical raw material as he needs to develop his 'second nature', or the habits of virtue and a well-informed conscience. *Consuetudo est altera natura*, Habit is a second nature.<sup>23</sup>

The assumption informs an early passage in the first book where Genius instructs Amans, 'thou myht take evidence | To reule with thi conscience' (I.247–48). The pair of rhyming words — 'evidence' and 'conscience' — and the very same phraseology is used throughout the poem as if to underline the ethical eclecticism and pragmatism of the work (for other instances see III.2249–50; III.2349–50; 32541–42; V.1847–48; V.2881–82; V.2919–20; VII.4001–02). The evidence is admittedly not all of one kind in the *Confessio*; it is not all evidentiary in the etymological sense of 'things seen'. Where the rhyme occurs it encompasses instruction in the 'vices on and on' (I.245); the 'pleine lawe' (III.2248) against homicide; a 'gret ensample' (III.2352) about Alexander and the Pirate; the earthly

<sup>20</sup> White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> The best account of the intersection of rhetorical and memorial culture in medieval texts remains Mary J. Carruthers's *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially her fifth chapter, 'Memory and the Ethics of Reading'. It would be easy enough to redescribe all this *endoxa* — as Roland Barthes would when he notes that in the literary context Aristotle's probable opinions amount to a middling, self-censoring 'esthetic of the public' — as only another form of orthodoxy or ideology. See Barthes's *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 22–23. Janet Coleman takes this dour, anti-populist approach to the ethical eclecticism of Gower's *Confessio* when she calls it 'an encyclopedia of current prejudices and ideals'; see *Medieval Readers and Writers, 1350–1400* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 129.

<sup>22</sup> Headverse at VII.i as translated by Siân Echard and Clare Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the Confessio Amantis: An Annotated Translation* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1991), pp. 72–73.

<sup>23</sup> Marginal notation at VI.664, as translated in Peck and Galloway, *Confessio Amantis*, III, 426, acting as an authorizing gloss to the line 'Usage is the seconde kinde'.

teachings of Christ (III.2543); the ‘gold’ which perverts conscience and procures a false witness (V.2881); the words of a king’s fool which are ‘of goddes grace enspired’ (VII.4003). What allows for all of these heterogeneous instances to come together in the poem is their rhetorical embodiment. Amans is given a taxonomy of cases rather than categorical imperatives, an array of exemplary narratives rather than deontic norms, as though his moral prospects were delimited by evidence, not by some airy apodeictic. Evidence points to historical, customary knowledge (‘These olde worldes with the newe | Who that wol take in evidence’; VII.2702–03), an intelligence invented rather than infused.

Conscience has a central role to play here in gathering, sorting, and applying the historical evidence from ‘olde worldes’ to the diverse conditions that arise in the ‘newe’ moral life. Genius all along teaches that it is left to Amans to ‘take that him thenketh good, | And leve that which is not so’ (VIII.260–61). In this scheme of things the moral agent does not have anything like the certainty of infallible first principles to go on in sorting what is good, which further distinguishes Gower’s ethical approach from those of the academic philosophers for whom conscience is the cornerstone of natural morality. In such discussions the conscience was split between what was commonly known as *synderesis* and *conscientia*, the former containing the natural precepts that the latter deliberates upon and applies in action.<sup>24</sup> As Philip the Chancellor explains, *synderesis* counterbalances the original impulse to sin and is therefore innate; it is not an acquired power. It is a natural rectitude, accessible as a function of reason, which Philip describes as an inner voice that ‘murmurs back in answer to sin’. For Bonaventure *synderesis* weighs naturally on the human will, *naturale quoddam pondus*,<sup>25</sup> and embodies quite specific moral precepts (i.e., the commandments of the Decalogue and of Christ). Aquinas also observes that the role of *conscientia* is to apply the natural law precepts of *synderesis*, whose purpose is again ‘to murmur back in reply to evil and to turn us towards what is good’.<sup>26</sup> He developed the teaching of his master Albert the Great who identified *synderesis* with an ‘ensemble of innate principles’.<sup>27</sup> In the fourteenth century with the development of ‘voluntarist’ ethics of Scotus and Ockham, conscience becomes more closely aligned with the dictates

<sup>24</sup> On the distinction and for the following examples I owe much to Timothy C. Potts’s *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) and Bradley’s *Aquinas and the Twofold Human Good*.

<sup>25</sup> White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> Westberg, *Right Practical Reason*, p. 101.

of God (i.e., a divine-command theory), though for practical purposes there is still a natural moral order known to reason and conscience.<sup>28</sup>

Gower does not yield much to the idealism or mysticism of the philosophers. The *Confessio* indicates instead that the storing up of 'evidence' is constitutive of an individual's moral horizons, as for the poet conscience is indeed an acquired faculty.<sup>29</sup> For instance, Genius makes reference to a 'reule of conscience' (I.1236), making its proper regulation depend on the 'evidence' that is at hand, as already indicated in an earlier passage: i.e., Amans is to 'take evidence | To reule with thi conscience' (I.247–48). That conscience must submit to evidence and remembrances must make it — to some significant degree — conditional, contingent, insufficient in itself. What is the upshot of this view of conscience? How could Gower justify the moral conscience if it is subject to external forces? Gower explores the implications of the idea at a meta-ethical level, as can be shown with an example. It is just one among other pieces of evidence to which conscience must appeal and without which conscience would not be grounded.

The precariousness of conscience is made emphatic in the 'Tale of Pope Boniface' (II.2803–3084), an exemplum taken from fairly recent chronicle history and molded to fit the purposes of the *Confessio Amantis*. Of interest, first of all, is the relation that obtains (or fails to obtain) between Latin gloss and English tale, illustrating the translation of clerical culture and the dispersal of its claims to authority. The accompanying Latin frames the tale by assigning its meaning to providence:

Hic ponit Confessor exemplum contra istos in causa dignitatis adquirende supplantatores. Et narrat qualiter Papa Bonifacius predecessorum suum Celestimum a papatu coniectata circumuencione fraudulenter supplantauit. Set qui potentes a sede deponit, huiusmodi supplantacionis fraudem non sustinens, ipsum sic in sublime exaltatum postea in profundi carceris miseriam proici, fame que siti cruciari, necnon et ab huius vite gaudiis dolorosa morte explanari finali conclusione permisit.

(Here the Confessor presents an instructive example against those supplantors in the cause of acquiring dignity. And he tells how Pope Boniface supplanted his predecessor Celestine from the papacy, with a scheme fraudulently constructed. But He Who deposes

<sup>28</sup> See the discussion of Ockham's thought in Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*, III, 103–10, and of Scotus's and Ockham's ethics in Luscombe's 'Natural Morality and Natural Law', pp. 713–15. Natural law is discussed in Thomas A. Shannon's 'Method in Ethics: A Scotistic Contribution' and in Marilyn McCord Adams' 'The Structure of Ockham's Moral Theory', in *The Contexts of Casuistry*, ed. by James F. Keenan and Thomas A. Shannon (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> As Potts observes in his *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, 'the idea of conscience being formed by training was a blind spot' in medieval philosophy' (p. 19).

the powerful from their seats, not tolerating the fraud of this sort of supplantation, allowed the one who had been sublimely exalted to be thrown later into the wretchedness of deep prison, tortured by hunger and thirst, and at the last end to be uprooted from the joys of this life in a sorrowful death.)<sup>30</sup>

If the synopsis has any purchase on the vernacular narrative, it is only by having imposed an exegesis that is at most latent in the pattern of events. Nowhere in the tale is the divine hand of providence invoked — except fraudulently, as we will see — to render events explicable; the absence of divine intervention is more evident. In fact the narrative exposition summons a more complex response than the moralization requires of readers, evidence of what Charles Runacres calls Gower's determination 'to use the independent meaning of his *narraciones* not only to contradict but also to expand and enhance his ethical analysis'.<sup>31</sup> Scanlon reads the tale as an expression of Gower's disenchantment with the Church, and the spurious Latin exegesis must lend support to the idea.<sup>32</sup>

Celestine was once a godly hermit, 'an holy clerk reclus, | Which full was of *gostli virtus*' (II.2817–18), making it all the more astonishing that he should be deceived by his conscience into believing God has spoken to him. Would he not have had the gift of discerning spirits? Where is the evidence of his 'gostli virtus'? Such is the essential matter of the first half of the exemplum, as if playing on the Pope's celestial-sounding name and throwing into question the merit of eremitical isolation. As the story goes an envious cardinal, the future Pope Boniface, hatches a plan to unseat Celestine. The Cardinal arranges to have the Pope share his sleeping quarters with a 'clergoun of yong age' (II.2850), a youth instructed to apply a brass trumpet in the following manner:

'Thou schalt,' he seide, 'whan time is  
Awaite, and take riht good kepe,  
Whan that the Pope is fast aslepe

<sup>30</sup> Translation from the Latin are by Andrew Galloway in *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck, vol. I.

<sup>31</sup> Runacres, 'Art and Ethics', p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, pp. 248–62. However, Scanlon is finally in agreement with the Latin exegesis when he argues that Boniface's final ruin is proof of divine retribution, suggesting that the only real authority and power resides in God: 'Gower disenfranchises clerical power by making it entirely spiritual' (p. 262). Yet in the tale the downfall of the supplanting prelate is not attributed to God; it is rather something that comes about by means of military power, since Boniface is taken captive by the forces of King Louis as the result of Boniface's arrogating secular authority to himself. Gower removes every spiritual sanction from his vernacular tale so that the reasons for the Pope's captivity are entirely explicable in temporal rather than spiritual terms.

And that non other man be nyh;  
 And thanne that thou be so slyh  
 Thurghout the Trompe into his Ere,  
 Fro hevene as thogh a vois it were,  
 To soun of such prolacioun  
 That he his meditacioun  
 Therof mai take and understande,  
 As thogh it were of goddes sonde'.

(II.2868–78)

All the young clerk must do is employ the instrument to create the impression of a special divine dictation calling on the Pope to resign his post. Carrying out the Cardinal's ingenious plan that very night, the clerk blows into the trumpet three times:

and thus awake  
 This holi Pope he made thries,  
 Wherof diverse fantasies  
 Upon his grete holinesse  
 Withinne his herte he gan impresse.  
 The Pope ful of innocence  
 Conceiveth in his conscience  
 That it is goddes wille he cesse;  
 Bot in what wise he may relesse  
 His hihe astat, that wot he noght.

(II.2896–905)

The Pope is left feeling that he has been privy to a special revelation, an order from above resembling, as if to invoke voluntarist theories of divine-command, the clarion voice of God. The nature of the ruse involved also has added resonance in light of earlier scholastic theories of *synderesis*, which as mentioned regard the conscience as a murmuring back to sin; here the only thing approximating such a sound is the blaspheming trump, 'As thogh it were of goddes sonde'. Indeed the young clerk has by speaking into the horn successfully simulated the voice of God, recalling biblical and iconographical instances of such instruments acting as the *vox Dei*.<sup>33</sup> Numerous visual depictions show that the trumpet heralded war and

<sup>33</sup> Origen thought the trumpet represents 'the efficacy of the Word of God'; see Gustave Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (London: Dent, 1941), p. 62, citing the *Patrologiae cursus completus* [...] *Series Graeca*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 161 vols (Paris: Migne, 1857–66), XIII,

apocalyptic judgements, and Gower elsewhere employs the instrument to proclaim death-judgements.<sup>34</sup> What might the thrice-trumpeted word signify? It is not hard to imagine it travestyng the last blast sounded in St John's Apocalypse ('Et septimus angelus tuba cecinit: et factae sunt voces magnae in caelo dicentes: Factum est regnum huius mundi, Domini nostri et Christi eius, et regnabit in saecula saeculorum' — And the seventh angel sounded the trumpet: and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdom of this world is become our Lord's and his Christ's, and he shall reign for ever and ever; Apocalypse 11.15), announcing the final defeat of worldly institutions — albeit in Gower's exemplum a credulous papacy is overcome by a corrupt cardinal. The association serves Gower's purposes well. For indeed, what is missing in this exemplary narrative of all-too-human intrigue and deception is a natural or supernatural moral source, setting into high relief the profound problem of ordinary ethical agency: the conscience can be mistaken not just in the application of general precepts, but in its very intuitions of rules it is supposed to follow. Perhaps a hermit isolated from the world is more likely than others to mistake the grounds of morality. Clearly his presumption and credulity must be avoided.

Whereas the philosophers and mystics may speak of a sovereign metaphysical source of morality, the poet's conscience has a more mundane mainspring; for indeed, Gower is especially sceptical of the idea of morality as theophany.<sup>35</sup> God cannot be held responsible, Gower teaches, for ethics remains within the orbit of practical reason rather than inspiration or revelation:

col. 319. Macaulay notes that the chronicle versions upon which Gower would have drawn for the 'Tale of Pope Boniface' make no mention the trumpet as the means of deception, strengthening the case that synderetic conscience is of signal concern to Gower in this tale; *The English Works of John Gower*, I, 490–91. On the blasphemy involved in simulating the voice of God, see Patrick Gallacher, *Love, the Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), pp. 123–24; and Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, pp. 258–62.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Trump of Death', *Confessio Amantis*, I.2021–2253. As in the 'Tale of Pope Boniface', 'The Trump of Death' in the first book sounds a false alarm and yet inspires credulity in its audience (see especially ll. 2214–25).

<sup>35</sup> Two notable examples in which Gower seems alive to the dangers of a divine-command ethics are the 'Tale of Mundus and Paulina' (I.761–1071) and the 'Tale of Nectanabus' (VI.1789–2366), both of which can be read as parodic Annunciation narratives in which women are duped when they mistake the voice of man for the *vox Dei*. See further the chapter on 'The Annunciation Pattern in Amorous Persuasion' in Gallacher's *Love, the Word, and Mercury*, pp. 26–43.

Bot what man wolde himself avise,  
 His conscience and noght misuse,  
 He may wel ate ferste excuse  
 His god, which evere stant in on;  
 In him ther is defalte non,  
 So moste it stonde upon ousselve

(Prol.520–25)

A parallel biblical imperative, ‘Non dicas: Ille me implanavit [...] . // Deus ab initio constituit hominem, / Et reliquit illum in manu consilii sui’ (Say not: He hath caused me to err [...]. God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel; Ecclesiasticus 15.12–14) must have spoken to Gower of the importance of moral autonomy. If there are obvious limitations to this pragmatic ethic, with all the weight it puts on self-governance and evidence, there are reasons to think its practitioners are not worse off than the philosophers or hermits. Ethics may be better off for disavowing mystical complacencies about the transparency and infallibility of natural law, such that ordinary moral agents may come to possess a prudent circumspection Celestine lacked.

So it would be wrong to think Gower can provide no substantive moral (or for that matter biblical) justification for conscience in the absence of some (super)natural moral metaphysics. Gower avoids antinomianism by asking his audience to consider the meaning of the ‘Tale of Pope Boniface’, one moral case among others that challenges inflexible clerical platitudes and becomes the basis for imagining a teachable conscience. The exemplary narrative, in other words, supplements even as it desublimates the philosophy of natural law, or rather it creates a narrative ethics out of normative ethical theory. Conscience is best understood here as a heightened consciousness (recalling one of the original senses of the word, *con* = with + *science* = knowledge),<sup>36</sup> a shared understanding among moral agents in the public sphere. The vernacular narratives of the *Confessio* are meant to make, move, and improve the *res publica*. At the same time, Gower presupposes the ideal polity he is attempting to vitalize. ‘The Tale of Pope Boniface’, for example, functions in place of synderesis, with its legacy of Latin authority and divine sanction, to generate a new conscience that is to act as the people’s moral murmur. Granted, the vernacular tale is inevitably more uncertain than any unmediated, numinous command, and a murmur is not as clear as a

<sup>36</sup> Potts, in *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy*, observes: ‘Where the prefix [...] modif[ies] the meaning of the noun, the original sense is that of knowing something (in company) with someone else’ (p. 2).

heavenly trump; on the other hand, such tale-telling depend on the understanding of those to whom it speaks in common, if only to upset their more self-satisfied ideas about the sources of moral understanding. Gower seems to have developed a novel sense of the possibilities and liabilities of murmuring throughout his works. In his *Mirour de l'Omme* Gower indicates that his fierce anticlerical critique is based on nothing less than a popular acknowledgement of the corruption of the Roman curia:

Ce que je pense escrire yci  
 N'est pas par moy, ainz est ensi  
 Du toute cristiene gent  
 Murmur, compleinte, vois et cry

(What I intend to write here is not from myself only, but is rather the murmur, complaint, voice, and cry of all Christian folk).<sup>37</sup>

In his next large work murmuring is sharpened into the Latin *Vox Clamantis*, a deeply ambiguous cry that at once claims to be common ('Vox populi cum voce dei concordat'; III.1267) and uncommon (emulating the prophetic *vox clamantis in deserto*).<sup>38</sup> By the time he came to write the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower discovered how best to align the dissident claims of a wider social conscience with his individual poetic practice. Here he is equally antagonistic to the corruption of Holy Church, but the English carries through the rebuke with a force and subtlety perhaps hitherto unavailable in French or Latin. It is not a consistently aggressive protest like that found in his earlier works, but rather an articulate vernacular murmur by means of which Gower maximizes his chances and multiplies effects.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Lines 18445–48 of John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902), I, 214; translated by William Burton Wilson, *The Mirror of Mankind* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1992), p. 253.

<sup>38</sup> See *Vox Clamantis*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, IV, 141. Gower identifies himself with the insular visionary John of Patmos (Prol. 57–58), while the title of the work alludes to the lone, messianic desert-dweller John the Baptist (see Isaiah 40. 3 and Luke 3. 1–6). On Gower's simultaneous appropriation of and ambivalence towards the common voice see Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 209–10.

<sup>39</sup> This moral murmur may have its flipside in *Murmur in aduersis* (I.vii), an aspect of Disobedience originating in Pride, anatomized in the first book of the *Confessio*. The lover admits he is diseased in his heart with 'With many a Murmur' (I.1388–89), contemplating how he fails to gain a requital from his lady-love. Gower condemns Murmur in *Mirour de l'Omme*, 2317–29,

The implications can be profound. Not only is a pope, once *in sublime exaltatum*, cast down after his vain attempt at imposture. The vernacular also functions to undermine clerical exegesis while appropriating the clerks' natural law — as if certifying that *vox populi* has indeed become *vox Dei*.<sup>40</sup>

where it is likewise said to attend Pride. Compare Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale', I.2459, which obliquely calls to mind the 1381 Rebellion; the Wife of Bath's Prologue, 406, for Alison's treatment of her fourth husband; and the description of the vice in the 'Parson's Tale', X.498–513. For all that, where Gower feels grumbling dissent is necessary, as a just response to the venality of the institutional church, he does not hesitate to employ the dissident murmur to great effect.

<sup>40</sup> On the identity of the *vox populi* and *vox Dei* see Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*, 12721–26, and *Vox Clamantis*, III.1267; but for a rather pessimistic view of how the people have become *sine moribus* see Gower's short Latin poem, 'De lucis scrutinio', in *John Gower: The Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. by R. F. Yeager, TEAMS, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), pp. 12–17.



# RHETORICAL GOWER: ARISTOTELIANISM IN THE *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*'S TREATMENT OF 'RETHORIQUE'

Georgiana Donavin

In the *Advancement of Learning* Francis Bacon declares, 'The duty and office of Rhetoric is to apply Reason to Imagination for the better moving of the will.'<sup>1</sup> This statement about the rhetorical office of *inventio*, or the art of inventing matter for discourse, relies on a faculty psychology popular from the classical period through the nineteenth century. In this statement, Bacon refers to the psychological operations of both the rhetorician who creates the discourse and the audience who receives it. That is, the rhetorician must combine the mental operations of Reason and Imagination in order to move the audience's Will to accept the speaker's contentions. Bacon's interest in the psychology of *inventio* has been attributed to Aristotle's analysis in the *Rhetoric* of human types, their greatest passions and their receptiveness to persuasion,<sup>2</sup> and can be traced through references in the Middle Ages to Aristotelian rhetoric. In his *Confessio Amantis*,<sup>3</sup> John Gower participates in an Aristotelian rhetorical

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed. by James Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath, 14 vols (London: Longman, 1862–1901), III, 409.

<sup>2</sup> Basing his claims on the fact that Theodore Goulston, whose edition of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* appeared in 1619, presented a copy of his work to Bacon, Karl Wallace correlates Bacon's theories of rhetoric with Aristotle's. See Karl R. Wallace, *Francis Bacon on Communication and Rhetoric; or, The Art of Applying Reason to Imagination for the Better Moving of the Will* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943).

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902). Book vii, lines 1507–1640, describe the art of rhetoric.

tradition,<sup>4</sup> and it could be said of Gower as Karl Wallace remarks of Bacon that 'like Aristotle [... he] sees rhetoric as a practical art which is useful in controlling [the audience's] wills and thereby their actions'.<sup>5</sup>

From the Middle Ages through the early modern period, as Francis Bacon's remarks show and an analysis of the *Confessio Amantis* will prove, readings of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* focused on explanations of how compelling language moves its listeners.<sup>6</sup> The process of persuasion is on one level personal and psychoanalytical, as Aristotle tailors the use of logical and emotional appeals to particular kinds of people in Book II. It is also political, as Aristotle sets the scenes for these discursive appeals in the legislature, court, and public ceremony. Most medieval readers encountered the three Aristotelian rhetorical scenes and their correlative types of rhetoric — deliberative for political debate, forensic for legal appeals, and epideictic for social ritual, respectively — through Ciceronian texts employed in rhetoric classes. Popular medieval introductions to rhetoric include the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, no longer ascribed to Cicero, and the *De inventione*;<sup>7</sup> these textbooks were ubiquitous, even though Aristotelian works were also available.<sup>8</sup> It may be commonplace to say that during the Middle Ages three practical strands of rhetoric developed out of Ciceronian schoolbooks — the *artes poetriae*, *dictaminis*, and *praedicandi* (the arts of poetry, letter writing, and preaching) — but medieval Aristotelians preserved the study of political speech. That the *Rhetoric* is included by itself or beside ethical and political treatises in manuscripts underscores this point.<sup>9</sup> As Janet Coleman demonstrates, in the thirteenth century, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* provided the principles for public discourse and political

<sup>4</sup> In his book *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2004), J. Allan Mitchell argues that the exempla in the *Confessio Amantis* engage the reader in rhetorical or probable reasoning as described by Aristotle.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace, *Francis Bacon*, p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. by George Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. by Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954); Cicero, *De inventione*, trans. by H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1949; repr. 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Many thanks to Charles F. Briggs for sharing with me his knowledge of English manuscripts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, related commentaries, and appendices.

<sup>9</sup> For a thorough discussion of how Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was compiled with other works, see James J. Murphy's 'The Scholastic Condemnation of Rhetoric in the Commentary of Giles of Rome on the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle', in *Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1967), pp. 833–41 (p. 840).

treatises began to be modelled upon these principles.<sup>10</sup> Medieval Aristotelians such as Robert Grosseteste, Robert Kilwardby, and Giles of Rome, the latter of whom will be a main subject here, also maintained the dual emphasis on the personal and political in rhetoric and in their theories of rhetorical psychologies which made the comments of Francis Bacon in the *Advancement of Learning* possible. Believing each person to be a microcosm of the macrocosmic society, kingdom, or universe in need of governance, John Gower and other Aristotelian rhetoricians like him enquired into how speech convinced each individual to behave morally and thus to rule himself, his kingdom, or world rightly.

Gower takes up the subject of rhetoric in the most overtly political book of his most personal poem, Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*, in order to demonstrate the academic preparation for becoming an ethical citizen. Up until Book VII, the *Confessio Amantis* includes a prologue excoriating abuses by the different estates of fourteenth-century society and six books narrating the lover's confession by Genius, the Priest of Venus. Each of these six books focuses on one mortal sin against love and offers exempla illustrating infractions against love's law. The final exemplum of Book VI is the 'Tale of Nectanabus', relating the downfall of Alexander's paternal tutor, and this tale catalyzes the lover's interest in hearing about Alexander's more celebrated teacher, Aristotle. In response to Amans's appeal to hear the instructions of Aristotle to Alexander, Book VII diverges from the confession of the seven deadly sins against love to a compendium of Aristotelian learning, suitable for kings. Although Genius, as Venus's priest, feels inadequate for such an academic summation and reveals the tensions between the privacy of love's shrift and the shared nature of political lore, he proceeds to organize knowledge into the categories of 'Theorique', including Theology, Physics and Mathematics; 'Rethorique', including Grammar and Logic; and 'Practique', including Ethics, Economics, and Policy. Derived from Aristotle's classification of the theoretical, practical, and productive sciences, these categories of learning were loosely available to Gower in Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*,<sup>11</sup> although, as we shall see, the *Confessio Amantis* makes important adaptations to Latini's organization

<sup>10</sup> Janet Coleman, 'Some Relations between the Study of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, *Ethics* and *Politics* in the Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century University Arts Courses and the Justification of Contemporary Civics Activities', in *Political Thought and the Realities of Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Joseph Canning and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 147–53.

<sup>11</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres du Trésor*, ed. by Francis J. Carmody, University of California Publications in Modern Philology (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948).

of the disciplines. Within Book VII, the section on 'Rethorique' is embedded in discussions of works believed to be Aristotelian as a way to underscore the Philosopher's authority for ideas presented there. Since the main thrust of Book VII is an education in personal and political rulership, it is partially modelled upon the Aristotelian *specula principum*,<sup>12</sup> including the *Secretum secretorum* and also on Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*,<sup>13</sup> which claims that the virtues of the king coincide with those of the orator, as characterized by Aristotle.<sup>14</sup>

Besides allusions to the *Rhetoric* in the *De regimine principum*, so well-liked that John Trevisa translated it into Middle English around 1400, Gower probably knew Aristotle's art of persuasion through Giles of Rome's *Commentary* and possibly through one of the numerous abbreviations of the *Rhetoric* in medieval English manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> Whether or not Gower could have read a Latin translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a vexed question because the medieval English reception of this text takes place in an extended but somewhat obscure history. From 1256 onward, according to Roger Bacon, the *Rhetoric* was available in Hermannus Alemannus's flawed, but easy-reading Latin translation.<sup>16</sup> Roger Bacon comments in his *Opus maius* that even this weak edition of the *Rhetoric* makes it clear that Aristotle's teachings are more appropriate than Cicero's for moral argument, for moving the Will so that the soul can participate in Providence.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, clues

<sup>12</sup> See especially Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 1–23, 139–59; Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics of Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 108–36; Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex and Politics*, Medieval Cultures, 38 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 107–48.

<sup>13</sup> *Secretum secretorum*, in *Opera hactenus inedita Roger Baconi*, ed. by R. Steele, 16 pts in 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905–40), v, 25–172. Middle English versions possibly available to Gower are edited by M. A. Manzalaoui for the EETS (*Secretum secretorum: Nine English Versions*, Early English Text Society, o.s., 276 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)). Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum* (Rome: Apud Bartholomaeum Zannettum, 1607; repr. Aalen, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Coleman, 'Some Relations', p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> Giles of Rome, *Rhetorica Aristotelis cum fundatissimi arcium et theologie doctoris Egidi de Roma luculentissimis commentarii* (Venice: [n. pub.], 1515).

<sup>16</sup> Cambridge, Peterhouse, MS 57 of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and also Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 130 of the fourteenth century testify to the extended life of Hermannus's early translation, even after the production of William of Moerbeke's superior Latin *Rhetoric* in the 1280s.

<sup>17</sup> *Roger Baconis Moralis philosophia*, ed. by Eugenio Massa (Zurich: Thesaurus mundi, 1953), v.2.6–7 (p. 251): 'Item, difficilus et minus delectabiliter se habet ad bonum, quam speculativus ad verum et ideo oportet quod maiora et forciora habeamus inductiva, ut scilicet flectam u<r>

exist that after William of Moerbeke's more precise Latin translation of the *Rhetoric* was completed in Paris around 1280, it also circulated among English intellectuals.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of such hints, such as the quotation of William's translation in a fourteenth-century English graduation speech, scholars have been reluctant to acknowledge the influence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in fourteenth-century England. This is largely because English university statutes do not mention the text until the fifteenth century. However, considering the conservatism of medieval academic statutes — not usually introducing curricular innovations but inhibiting departures from established studies — and considering the many exchanges between masters at Paris, where translations of the *Rhetoric* were prepared, and those in Oxford and Cambridge, common sense dictates that the *Rhetoric* had some influence over intellectual conversations about persuasive language and that the number of medieval Aristotelians extends beyond isolated references by Roger Bacon, Giles of Rome, and John Gower.<sup>19</sup> Latin translations of the *Rhetoric* were circulating in both Oxford and Cambridge,<sup>20</sup> and numerous abbreviations or tables of the text offered summations of its important dictates.<sup>21</sup>

ad credendum veritatibus circa bonum anime et ad operandum eas, et quatinus inclinemur ad iusticiam in causis ventilandis. Set r<e>thoricum argumentum potest in hec ergo huiusmodi argumentum est nobis eligendum. Hoc autem argumentum non est notum vulgo artistarum apud Latinos, quoniam libri Aristotilis et suorum expositorum nuper translati sunt et nondum sunt in usu studencium rhetorica vero tulliana non docet hoc argumentum, nisi propter causas ventilandas, ut orator possit persuadere iudice, quatinus consenciat parti sue et indignetur adverse. Set flexus triplex est, ut dixi, et ideo hoc argumentum, ut Tullius docet, non sufficit, set indigemus completa doctrina Aristotilis et commentatorum eius.'

<sup>18</sup> William of Moerbeke, *Rhetorica*, in *Aristoteles*, ed. by Leonhard Spengel, 2 vols (Leipzig: Trübner, 1894), I, 178–342. Its presence in fourteenth-century England is indicated in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 55, first noted by P. Osmond Lewry in 'Four Graduation Speeches from Oxford Manuscripts (c. 1270–1310)', *Mediaeval Studies*, 44 (1982), 138–80. Digby 55 includes a graduation speech quoting from William's *Rhetorica*. On fol. 203<sup>ra</sup> the speech cited here opens: 'Sicud dicit Philosophus primo Rhetorice laus est sermo elucidans magnitudinem virtutis' (*Rhetorica*, I.9).

<sup>19</sup> James Weisheipl, 'A Curriculum of the Faculty of Arts at Oxford in the Early Fourteenth Century', *Mediaeval Studies*, 26 (1964), 143–85 (p. 145).

<sup>20</sup> The graduation speech containing the quotation from William's translation that was cited earlier was delivered in Oxford, and in Cambridge both Peterhouse and Pembroke colleges preserve their manuscripts of Hermannus Allemanus's translation (Peterhouse, MS 57; Pembroke College, MS 130).

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, London, British Library, MS Royal 5. C. iii or Peterhouse, MS 208. London, Gray's Inn, MS 2 has a particularly helpful index of concepts from Aristotle's *Ethics*,

Karin Fredborg contends that such tables and commentaries indicate a lively debate about the relationship of Aristotelian to Ciceronian rhetorics, and Charles F. Briggs has recently elaborated on their use by medieval scholars.<sup>22</sup> Someone as well read and well informed as John Gower could very well have had a much broader understanding of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals and their political applications than is offered in his basic source, the *De regimine principum*.

If Gower became familiar with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, it would have been not through university studies, but legal training.<sup>23</sup> An education at the Inns of Court would have included history and theory of rhetoric, at the very least the dictaminal manuals that were so prevalent in the fourteenth century, and the fourth book of Boethius's *Topics* that defined the field.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, advanced training in rhetoric was essential, as we shall see, to Gower's manipulations of the definition of the discipline in Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*.<sup>25</sup>

Gower's training no doubt led him to Giles of Rome's *Commentary* on William of Moerbeke's translation of the *Rhetoric*, and perhaps Giles's *Commen-*

*Politics*, and *Rhetoric*. The alphabetical listing of concepts ranges from *accipere* to *ymago* (177a–214a).

<sup>22</sup> Karin Fredborg, 'Buridan's *Quaestiones super rhetoricae Aristotelis*', in *The Logic of John Buridan: Acts of the 3rd European Symposium on Medieval Logic and Semantics, Copenhagen 16–21 Nov. 1975*, ed. by Jan Pinborg (Copenhagen: Opuscula Graecolatina, 1976), pp. 47–59 (p. 50). Charles F. Briggs, 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Later Medieval Universities: A Reassessment', *Rhetorica*, 25.3 (2007), 243–68.

<sup>23</sup> John Fisher has added credence to the legend that Gower and Chaucer met at the Inns of Court by pointing out that in the *Mirour de l'Omme* at line 21772 Gower describes himself as wearing 'a garment with striped sleeves', the garb of court officials in fifteenth-century illuminations. See John Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 55. Also see John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta: Records and Memorials of his Life and Death' in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 23–42 (p. 25).

<sup>24</sup> Richard J. Schoeke, 'On Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford', *Mediaeval Studies*, 30 (1968), 214–25 (p. 218).

<sup>25</sup> In the first article focusing on the section on rhetoric in Book VII on the *Confessio Amantis*, James J. Murphy ('John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the First Discussion of Rhetoric in the English Language', *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), 401–11 (p. 409)) judges Gower's knowledge of the discipline 'vague' (p. 410). Since then, other critics have illustrated Gower's expertise in the field, most notably Götz Schmitz ('Rhetoric and Fiction: Gower's Comments on Eloquence and Courtly Poetry', in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Peter Nicholson (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 117–42), Rita Copeland (*Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 179–220), and Diane Watt (*Amoral Gower*, pp. 38–62).

tary, along with the quotations from Aristotle in the *De regimine principum*, provided the portions of the *Rhetoric* that Gower knew. The *Confessio Amantis*'s treatment of rhetoric bears many similarities to Giles's *Commentary*, which was readily available and is preserved today in Cambridge, Peterhouse MS 82, a late thirteenth-century copy. Appearing soon after the dissemination of William's Latin *Rhetorica* (1280s), migrating to England almost immediately and gaining such popularity that it was printed in six editions between 1481 and 1555, Giles of Rome's *Commentary* on the *Rhetoric* provided the most important interpretation on rhetoric texts available in medieval Latin.<sup>26</sup> Through Giles of Rome's reading, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* entered a field dominated by Cicero and Boethius and added a new psychological emphasis to rhetorical studies. While it analyses the mental operations that produce rhetoric and respond to it, Giles's *Commentary* is most interested, as is Aristotle, in how these operations play out in the political realm. In the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower, too, uses a rhetoric that appeals to the particular situation and feelings of an audience in order to accomplish political aims.

In his *Commentary*, Giles identifies rhetoric as a science of Reason that convinces the Intellect by first moving the appetitive Will.<sup>27</sup> Thus, rhetoric incites the passions in order to compel reasonable consideration and, consequently, right action.<sup>28</sup> This definition of rhetoric seems an inversion of the one by Francis Bacon cited at the beginning of this essay, in which the rhetorician's Reason first excites the irascible Imagination. However, since both Giles of Rome and Francis Bacon emphasize *inventio* and explain it as an operation in faculty psychology,

<sup>26</sup> George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, 3 vols (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1927–48), II, 923.

<sup>27</sup> Both James J. Murphy ('The Scholastic Condemnation of Rhetoric') and J. R. O'Donnell ('The Commentary of Giles of Rome on the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. by T. S. Sandquist and M. R. Powicke (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 139–56) have noted that this definition implies a denigration of rhetoric. Since the intellect draws conclusions from its own thinking, but the appetites are drawn by the properties of things outside them, the ideas based on intellect alone must be more objective and thus more compelling. Giles himself notes this when he writes in 1D, 'Per rationes dialecticas magis probatur aliquid esse verum'. However, the conclusion of this sentence is 'per rhetoricas vero magis esse bonum', so that while dialectic may approach the truth more closely, rhetoric illuminates the good. According to the doctrine of Natural Law outlined in the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas, Giles's teacher, the passions naturally tend toward the good, and thus operating upon the passions, rhetoric sways humans to fulfil their ethical potential.

<sup>28</sup> S. Robert, 'Rhetoric and Dialectic According to the First Latin Commentary on the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle', *New Scholasticism*, 31 (1957), 484–98 (p. 493).

declare that discourse must evoke the reasonable and appetitive aspects of the hearer's soul, and expect this evocation to effect a nobler movement of the Will, future study of the comparisons between their discussions of rhetoric would no doubt aid our understanding of an English Aristotelian tradition. Participating in this tradition, Gower's section on 'Rethorique' in the *Confessio Amantis* and the uses of rhetoric by Genius and Amans may be regarded as a popular dramatization of an Aristotelian psychology of persuasion. Gower portrays an Aristotelian psychomachia of *inventio*, a scene in which Reason and Will conjoin to produce morally compelling speech. Genius articulates the linguistic principles for this psychic conjunction in the section on 'Rethorique'.

The 'Rethorique' section begins with a Latin verse whose first two lines announce their indebtedness to Aristotle: 'Compositi pulcra sermonis verba placere | Principio poterunt, veraque fine placent.' These lines echo Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, I.1.12–14, which states that 'that which is true and better is naturally always easier to prove and more likely to persuade' than false but beautifully adorned ideas.<sup>29</sup> As the Middle English verses of the 'Rethorique' section open, Genius, like Aristotle in Book I of the *Rhetoric*, establishes a definition of the discipline. In his definition, Genius manipulates Aristotle's opening dictum that rhetoric is the 'counterpart' of dialectic by illustrating how logic is not so much a correlative of or even an overarching subject heading for rhetoric, but actually serves as rhetoric's handmaiden.<sup>30</sup> To begin his lecture, Genius points out that the faculty of speech distinguishes humankind from beast, and since it is such a great gift from God, humans have the responsibility to use it honestly. Therefore, 'Is Rethorique the science | Appropried to the reverence | Of wordes that ben resonable' (1523–25); in other words, rhetoric teaches language tools for the discernment and frank employment of rational thought. As part of this rhetoric curriculum, according to Genius, grammar dictates congruities in sentences while logic shows the difference between truth and falsehood. Therefore, grammar makes the oral or written construction of a speech possible while logic makes the ideal end of rhetoric possible. Reversing the traditional hierarchy of dialectic and rhetoric, possibly intended by Aristotle in the first line of the *Rhetoric*, but actually cemented by Boethius's pejorative summation of the field of rhetoric in

<sup>29</sup> English translation from the Loeb edition of the *Rhetoric* by John Henry Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926). I have chosen Freese's translation over Kennedy's here for the former's felicity.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I.1. Kennedy, unlike Freese, does not translate the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic as that of 'counterpart'. Kennedy retains the original word *antistrophos* and explains his preservation of the context of Greek choral lyric (p. 28 n. 2).

Book IV of the *Topics*,<sup>31</sup> Genius echoes Giles of Rome's *Commentary* on Aristotle. In his commentary on the *Rhetoric*, Giles rebuts Boethius's characterization of rhetoric as inferior to dialectic and establishes rhetoric's supremacy. The supremacy of rhetoric, no longer the 'counterpart' of dialectic but instead the titular head of language skills, is the main impression left by Genius's explanation on how grammar and logic serve 'Rethorique's' ends.

Boethius's characterization of rhetoric in the fourth book of the *Topics* provides a foil for Giles of Rome and then John Gower, as they all attempt to grapple with Aristotle. While Boethius argues that rhetoric is a lesser subject than dialectic because the former treats contingent rather than eternal matters, persuades a judge rather than a worthy disputant, employs examples rather than syllogisms, moves the appetites rather than the intellect, and refers to opinion rather than to truth, Giles reconfigures the purposes and operations of rhetoric while insisting on its importance. Giles's interpretation of Aristotle counters the Boethian injunction that rhetoricians compel only a fleeting adherence to arguments about particular cases while dialecticians absolutely convince their interlocutors about universals. Although upholding dialectic as the more speculative science since it concerns itself solely with the Intellect, Giles demonstrates that rhetorical as well as dialectical situations could induce contemplation of universals.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, while agreeing that the audiences for rhetoric and dialectic differ, Giles does not insist that the former be a judge, but allows for a common member — *simplex et grossus* — of the community, thereby declaring rhetoric a popular and often political form of address.<sup>33</sup> A mass audience would find formal syllogisms tedious, so Giles maintains the traditional distinction between types of proof used in rhetoric and dialectic.<sup>34</sup> However, Giles's *Commentary* diverges from Boethian teachings in emphasizing that dialectical proofs are based on probable reasoning and command opinion, not necessary conclusions.<sup>35</sup> Significantly, this

<sup>31</sup> *Patrologiae cursus completus [...] Series Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 221 vols (Paris: Migne, 1844–64), LXIV, cols 1173–1216.

<sup>32</sup> Refuting Alfarabi's contention that Aristotle distinguishes dialectic as the science of universals from rhetoric as that of particulars, Giles writes: 'Nam res sunt cognitae secundum modum quo habent esse in intellectu; sunt vero volitae prout in seipsis. Nam verum et falsum sunt in anima. Bonum et malum sunt in rebus [...]. Sunt ergo res magis intellectae secundum esse universale, volitae vero secundum particularem existentiam' (*Commentary*, 1A).

<sup>33</sup> Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 2A.

<sup>34</sup> 'Instrumenta rhetoricae sunt enthymeme et exempla, dialecticae vero syllogismus et inducito' (Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 2A).

<sup>35</sup> 'Per rationes probabiles generatur opinio' (Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 1D).

divergence from tradition leads to Giles's most radical relocation of rhetoric as opposed to dialectic. Since dialectic, and not rhetoric, is the realm of opinion, Giles writes, we must ascribe to rhetoric the realm of belief and acknowledge the intensity and endurance of its effects.<sup>36</sup> People cling to their beliefs, Giles notes, much more steadfastly than to their opinions.<sup>37</sup> This truism is aptly illustrated by rhetorical processes in the *Confessio Amantis* which forever alter Amans's beliefs about his identity and the meaning of love. Through his exchanges with Genius, Amans must accept his own sinfulness and eventually his changed social status due to advanced age. As the end of the *Confessio* illustrates, Amans's new beliefs about himself and his public position have an important correlation to attitudes toward English rule. Taking into account the Priest's advice and gaining control of his inordinate passions, Amans demonstrates the sort of self-governance that is incumbent upon both the people and their leaders.

Like Giles of Rome, Gower takes issue with the subjugation of rhetoric, particularly with the premises that it does not demonstrate truth and or move the Intellect to righteousness while also communicating to the passions. Characterizing rhetoric as a language art leading to enduring belief, Genius elevates the discipline to an epistemological paradigm for discourse. Rita Copeland calls Gower's redefinition a 'most radical revision of the place of rhetoric in the system of the sciences', even in an age of shifting concepts of the discipline.<sup>38</sup> While Brunetto Latini's *Trésor*, upon which the overall structure of the *Confessio*'s Book VII is modelled, divides philosophy into Theory, Practice, and Logic and discusses only dialectic under its final category, Gower creates a place for rhetoric in Book VII's knowledge triad and makes grammar and logic, or dialectic, serve rhetoric's first principles. As Götz Schmitz remarks, Gower emphasizes the personal responsibility in and therefore the moral consequences of the use of words, and by placing a moral imperative on rhetoric, he lifts the discipline to the top of the *trivium*.<sup>39</sup> Because of Gower's restructuring of Latini in maintaining 'Theorique', 'Rethorique', and 'Practique' as the categories of learning, Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis* offers an excellent example of an argument made long ago by Richard McKeon that rhetoric was an architechtionic principle for medieval

<sup>36</sup> [...] fides aggeneratur sive credulitas' (Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 1D).

<sup>37</sup> 'Contingit autem aliquem adhaerere firmius his quae credit quam his quae opinatur' (Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 1D).

<sup>38</sup> Rita Copeland, 'Lydgate, Hawes, and the Science of Rhetoric in the Late Middle Ages', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53.1 (March 1992), 57–82 (p. 67).

<sup>39</sup> Schmitz, 'Rhetoric and Fiction', p. 128.

thought and composition.<sup>40</sup> Very similar to McKeon, Genius calls rhetoric the great science of discourse. While McKeon cites a number of divergent medieval texts and demonstrates their reliance on and perpetuation of rhetorical teachings, Genius straightforwardly concludes that rhetoric provides the rubrics for both oral and written composition. As far as I know, the *Confessio Amantis* is the only medieval text that explicitly articulates what McKeon long ago inferred from a variety of literary examples. Corroborating this sense of rhetoric's heightened status in Gower, Rita Copeland has demonstrated how the poet does not merely translate the tales included in the *Confessio Amantis*, but through 'rhetorical appropriation' establishes their meaning through strategic changes to the narratives.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, it could be said of Gower's adaptation to Latini's *divisio* that the alteration establishes the meaning. Uplifting 'Rethorique' to an epistemological category announces that the reader must know the concepts of rhetoric in order to understand the poem.

After establishing a definition of rhetoric in Book VII, Genius moves on to the means of persuasion and style, topics corresponding to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Books II and III. First of all, logic must discern the truth, and ethics must bind the trustworthy rhetorician. With these precepts, Genius alludes to the Aristotelian concepts of *logos*, or proof, and *ethos*, or the speaker's *persona*. He underscores the purpose for logical invention through his many references to the truthful or honest content of a speech and establishes the need for an ethical speaker by revealing the consequences born by any community adhering to evil orators. In Genius's lecture, the plain style heralds veracity and accountability: the ultimate goal of rhetoric is to 'the plein trouthe enforme' (VII.1638). Genius's preference for unadorned language shows Gower's debt to Aristotle's mandate in Book III of the *Rhetoric*: 'let the virtue of style [...] be defined as "to be clear"'.<sup>42</sup> Gower confirms his Aristotelian preference for straightforward language in both the *Confessio*'s tale-telling and the two versions of the Epilogue. Gower oversaw revisions to the Epilogue during the 1390s, excising references to Richard II and gesturing toward Henry of Lancaster, probably to reflect changing political realities and opportunities for patronage and presentation of his book.<sup>43</sup> In the

<sup>40</sup> Richard McKeon, 'Rhetoric in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 17 (1942), 1–32.

<sup>41</sup> Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation*, p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.2.1, trans. by Kennedy. Aristotle's mandate on clarity coincides with Priscian's *Liber constructionum* (Inst. Gram., 17–18).

<sup>43</sup> Gower's revisions to the Prologue and Epilogue of the *Confessio Amantis* have caused much consternation, leading to charges that the poet was a political sycophant. For corrective analyses

Epilogue from the first recension, with its dedication to Richard II, the narrator declares that he 'no Rethoriqe [has] used | Upon the forme of eloquence' (VIII.3063–64), and in the Epilogue from the second and third recensions, with its general dedication to England, he states that nothing in the poem is founded '[u]ppon the forme of rethoriqe | [...] wordes forto peinte and pike, | [a]s Tullius som tyme wrot' (VIII.3117–19). These statements do not comprise a denial of rhetoric as a method, but of the particular sort of figurative style that was more and more attributed to Cicero and would appear during the early modern period as euphuism, the composition of riotously embellished language employing figures of speech for their own sake. Just as Aristotle declares a decorative line a ruse for the uneducated,<sup>44</sup> Gower's treatment in Book VII of the Catilinian speeches reveals that only fools fall for a flowery speech.

Genius presents the Catilinian orations as summarized by Cicero, reported in Sallust and rehearsed by Latini as models of both helpful and harmful rhetoric: of truth versus falsehood, ethics versus personal advantage, and embellishments versus clarity.<sup>45</sup> When Catiline's conspirators were brought to trial, D. Junius Silanus, consul-designate and 'Cillenus' in Gower (VII.1607), was the first to give his opinion for the execution of the traitors. Genius declares Cillenus's speech a bulwark of 'trouthe' and 'comun profit' (VII.1608–09). Cicero and Cato confirm Cillenus's conclusions, delivering 'a tale plein withoute frounce' (VII.1594), and drawing the conclusion that '[t]her mai no peine be to strong' for such traitors (VII.1614). Later, Julius Caesar delivers a speech arguing the unconstitutionality of subjecting Roman citizens to capital punishment and begging the Senate to pity the Catilinean conspirators. According to Genius, Caesar 'the wordes of his sawe | Coloureth in an other weie' (VII.1624–25), while Cillenus, Cicero, and Cato had 'spieken plein after the lawe' (VII.1623). As Diane Watt points out, the 'coloring' of Caesar's language is synonymous with makeup or other sorts of false

of these revisions, see especially the following series of articles by Peter Nicholson: 'Gower's Revisions in the *Confessio Amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 19 (1984), 122–43; 'Poet and Scribe in the Manuscripts of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in the Later Middle English Literature*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 130–42; 'The Dedications of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Mediaevalia*, 10 (1988), 159–80. For a more recent treatment, see Dhira B. Mahoney, 'Gower's Two Prologues to *Confessio Amantis*', in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998), pp. 17–38. An expanded treatment of Mahoney's work will appear in her book on liminal discourse in medieval writings, forthcoming in *Disputatio*.

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.1.9.

<sup>45</sup> J. B. Greenough, *Select Orations and Letters of Cicero* (Boston: Kittredge, Ginn, 1902).

adornment that feminize and cheapen;<sup>46</sup> therefore, according to the 'Rethorique' section of the *Confessio*, the plain style is for straight men and straight talk. The masculine rhetoric of open honesty promoted by both Aristotle and Gower endures, Genius points out, in that history agrees with Cillenus, Cicero, and Cato's judgement of the conspirators, who were all eventually put to death or killed in battle. In contrast, Julius Caesar's speech is an example of misguided, feminine rhetoric because it is a fake facade, an adornment of falsehood. In Gower's treatment of rhetoric, truth needs no embellishment, but embellishments such as Julius Caesar's should be studied in order to be rebutted.

One reason why false rhetoric such as Caesar's can be so seductive is that words are like magic tokens and may be used in both good and bad incantations. As William Covino notes, all formulaic discourse meant to invoke change has something in common with spells.<sup>47</sup> In both the epigrammatic Latin poem and in Genius's discussion of rhetoric, Gower alludes to the natural force in words. The Latin poem insists in its last two lines that '[t]hese three are efficacious: herb, stone, speech; | [a]nd yet by force of word's weight more is moved'.<sup>48</sup> In his remarks on rhetoric, Genius again refers to the 'virtu' in words and compares it to the mystical properties of stones and herbs (VII.1545). Later, the priest waxes eloquent on verbal enchantment as he mesmerizes Amans and Gower's readers:

With word the wilde best is daunted  
With word the Serpent is enchaunted,  
Of word among the men of Armes  
Ben woundes heeled with the charmes  
Wher lacketh other medicine;  
Word hath under his discipline  
of Sorcerie the karectes

(VII.1565–70)

Genius illustrates here the sort of 'karecte', or conjuration, possible with repetition, an acceptable rhetorical figure because it underscores rather than obfuscates the truth. While Genius's impassioned delivery may be an example of white

<sup>46</sup> Watt, *Amoral Gower*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> William A. Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric and Literacy: An Eccentric History of the Composing Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 16–24. For a discussion of magic in the *Confessio Amantis* that also involves Ulysses the rhetorician, see Claire Fanger, 'Magic and Metaphysics of Gender in Gower's "Tale of Circe and Ulysses"', in *Revisioning Gower*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998), pp. 203–20.

<sup>48</sup> Siân Echard and Claire Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the 'Confessio Amantis': An Annotated Translation* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1991), p. 79.

rhetorical magic, the figure of Ulysses embodies the connection between black magic and verbal embellishment. As Genius says of Ulysses in Book VI: 'He was a gret rethorien, | He was a gret magicien' (VI.1399–1400). In Genius's passage on rhetoric, Ulysses's treasonous proposition to Anthenor is so eloquent that 'his facounde | Of goodly wordes which he tolde, | Hath mad that Anthenor him solde the toun' (VII.1560–63). Genius characterizes Ulysses's speech persuading Anthenor to betray Troy as a travesty of rhetorical method and a model of beguilement. In Book VI, the transition between the magical arts and the Aristotelian arts, Genius makes it clear that Ulysses is punished for his enchantments when Telegonus, his son by the enchantress Circe, slays him. Genius's own moral eloquence, again underscored by repetition, is an antidote to Ulysses's false speech when the priest declares:

Thurgh Sorcerie his lust he wan  
 Thurgh Sorcerie his wo began,  
 Thurgh Sorcerie his love he ches,  
 Thurgh Sorcerie his lif he les  
 (VI.1769–72)

As in Genius's 'conjuration' cited from Book VII, this reiteration of a prepositional phrase presses on the priest's main point — that sorcery is evil. In accordance with the recommendation of many medieval *artes praedicandi* and practice in sermons even today, Genius's use of repetition provides a sort of benign incantation to offset duplicitous, falsely figured speech. As in the old adage, the truth bears repeating.

To summarize the purpose of Book VII's section on 'Rethorique', Gower highlights the discipline in order to underscore his own discursive assumptions for the entire poem. By raising rhetoric to an architectonic principle of discourse, Gower agrees with Giles's *Commentary* about the importance of the field, especially for popular and political discourse. Rhetoric being a loftier discipline than Boethius allows, Genius identifies its end as truth and its means as the plain style. Congruously, one purpose of the poem is Amans's self-, moral-, and political-realization, and the process for his discovery involves Genius's tales, told largely in simple, straightforward language. As Genius offers instruction for Amans's personal awareness, the priest evinces concern for *ethos*, for being a reliable source.<sup>49</sup> While the many roles that Genius plays (confessor, *raconteur*, historian,

<sup>49</sup> Such concerns surface in Book V when Genius worries that his revelations about Venus's past will destroy his credibility (V.1382–83) and again in Book VI when the priest admits that in love's court, he has little opportunity to study Aristotle (VI.2420–40).

philosopher) and the inconsistencies that arise from these positions have led readers to question his authority,<sup>50</sup> another way to read such contradictions is to see how the various capacities and attendant discourses that Genius locates himself in can also be attributed to the rhetorical situation at hand. That is, striving to be the sort of trustworthy speaker represented by Cillenus in the 'Rethorique' section, Genius responds in the best way he can to Amans's immediate needs in their different contexts. In his book, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower*, J. Allan Mitchell illustrates how Genius's ethical advice must be grounded in the rhetorical moment and privilege contingencies over the presentation of universals so that Amans and the reader might respond immediately and practically to the discourse.<sup>51</sup> Genius's advice may not always be the solution to the situation at hand, such as when he warns the horrified Amans against incest or indulges in a lecture to this timid soul against unjust war. However, the final result of Genius's Aristotelian rhetoric is that Amans can move forward in productive acts for both himself and for England, and the 'Rethorique' section in Book VII defines the constructive rhetoric that enables this positive response.

Even beyond conveying Aristotelian *ethos* and *logos* in a plain style, the *Confessio Amantis* reflects Gower's debt to Aristotle by dramatizing a rhetorical psychomachia in the manner of Giles of Rome's *Commentary* on Book II of the *Rhetoric*. While Genius's definition of rhetoric is comparable to Giles's defence of the field in his *Commentary* on the *Rhetoric*, Book I, the overall frame of the *Confessio Amantis* and the exchanges between the lover and priest resemble Giles's analysis of persuasion in the *Commentary* on Book II. Like Giles of Rome's description of rhetoric as a psychological operation for influencing the Will in the political realm, Gower portrays Amans as the Will and Genius as the Intellect to which the Will must move.

In his glosses on the *Rhetoric*'s Book II, where Aristotle describes human emotions and discursive appeals to them, Giles explains the psychological mechanism by which rhetoric influences the Intellect through the Will and results in

<sup>50</sup> Theresa Tinkle (*Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 181) has called Genius 'no more inept than most mythographers' and concludes that through the priest's inconsistencies Gower exposes clashing discourses. Earlier readers offer a harsher reading of Genius as a fallible narrator. See for instance, Thomas J. Hatton, 'The Role of Venus and Genius in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: A Re-consideration', *Greyfriar*, 16 (1975), 29–40.

<sup>51</sup> J. Allan Mitchell makes a persuasive argument for the purposeful contingency of Genius's narratives (*Ethics and Exemplary Narrative*, pp. 36–60).

belief. Conceptualizing the passions that influence the Will, Giles remarks that the emotions described by Aristotle reside in the sensitive aspect of the soul — between the vegetative aspect controlling the instincts and the rational aspect overseeing pure intellection. These passions, such as love or hate, are characterized by their object, and the sensitive soul reacts to objects of passion because of their qualities.<sup>52</sup> For instance, the sensitive soul would feel love because the person it regards is lovable. According to the doctrine of Natural Law promulgated by Giles's famous teacher Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*, human passions naturally tend toward the good in order for humans to incline toward participation in the Eternal Good.<sup>53</sup> Thus, in exciting the passions, rhetoric would draw good things to the audience's attention, thereby moving the Will toward intellectual contemplation of the Good: as Giles himself puts it, 'per [rationes] rhetoricas vero magis [probatur] esse bonum' (Indeed, through rhetorical proofs more is proven to be good).<sup>54</sup> Since in rhetorical discourse the Will moves the Intellect to probable reasoning, it initiates consideration of what would be good in contingent circumstances: it enables 'the activity of the practical man who uses his reason to discover and to promote practically the common good of society'.<sup>55</sup> In the *Confessio Amantis*, beneficent action occurs when the Will and Intellect move in the same direction, that is, when Amans and Genius agree.

Although Genius and Amans embody and convey much more than personifications in a rhetorical drama, thinking about them as figures for the mental processes of rhetoric helps to explain their fragmentary and discontinuous nature. Genius is Venus's priest, but as was suggested earlier, he takes on a variety of roles and a dazzling array of discourses in order to bring his lessons home to Amans. He employs sermon exempla, classical poetry, and popular stories to illustrate Amans's faults; he conveys an expansive history of religions in order to place Venus's 'divinity' in context (Book V), and as this essay seeks to prove, he adopts Aristotelian texts for the purpose of emphasizing the personal and social importance of rhetoric (Book VII). In his essay for the present volume, Mitchell points out that by invoking a variety of conventional discourses in the vernacular, Genius attempts to plant Amans on common philosophical ground, where the

<sup>52</sup> 'Solum ergo erit passio in appetitu sensitivo, ut communiter ponitur, quia secundum appetitum trahitur ad conditiones objectorum' (Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 49A).

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Anton C. Pegis, 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1944). See I-II q.94, a.2.

<sup>54</sup> Giles of Rome, *Commentary*, 16A.

<sup>55</sup> Robert, 'Rhetoric and Dialectic', p. 494.

lover can store normative ethical advice in his memory and act upon it. When Genius disappears at the end of the poem and Amans discovers his true identity as the aged poet John Gower, the lover has internalized the priest's teachings at last. During the confessional scenes and until he claims his identity in Book VIII (2321), Amans is a partial representative of Gower's narrator, who famously claims in the Latin gloss at line 58 in Book I, 'Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem' (Here, in the character of others whom love binds, the author is pretending to be the Lover). When Amans identifies himself to Venus as the poet and appropriates Genius's wisdom as the priest follows his goddess into the stars (VIII. Epil.II.2948–51), the development and unification of these characters as a result of Aristotelian rhetoric is complete. James Simpson has already argued persuasively that 'Genius and Amans are faculties of the same soul [... whose] *Bildungsroman* [...] reveals the very subtle inter-relations of the sciences, particularly between ethics and politics'.<sup>56</sup> I would add that Gower elevated rhetoric to the top of the *trivium* in order to demonstrate language's importance in the concordance of Will and Intellect and the resulting maturity of the soul.

Gower advanced Genius to a principle of human Intelligence by endowing Venus's priest with the wisdom of traditional discourses. In Gower's sources, particularly in Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae*, the Genius figure plants the seeds of Gower's characterization when he acts as Nature's helpmate and manifests obedience to Natural Law.<sup>57</sup> In Alain, Genius submits to Nature's reasoning about the place of human sexuality in the providential scheme, and so his character represents the passions under the control of rational agency.<sup>58</sup> In Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Genius teaches the reasonable expression of feelings for the beloved, but as many have pointed out, his lessons often miss the mark.<sup>59</sup> When in Book I's 'Tale of Florent' the priest dwells too pleasurable on the ugliness of the aged heroine or in Book III seems to justify Canace and Machaire's incest, the tale's lesson against sinning against love seems askance, at best. Even though Genius works to establish his moral authority and to address Amans's current questions

<sup>56</sup> James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's 'Anticlaudianus' & John Gower's 'Confessio amantis'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 135.

<sup>57</sup> PL, CCX, col. 456.

<sup>58</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), pp. 219–21, 361–63.

<sup>59</sup> See Hatton, 'The Role of Venus'. For a survey of the Genius figure see Jane Chance Nitzche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

and confusions about love in a framework that privileges discrete situations, many of the priest's exempla are imperfectly pitched. Just as in Aristotelian intentional theory as constructed by Giles, Genius, the Intelligence, will not realize what is good and insist on restraints in order to achieve it without a movement of the Will. Amans, named 'The One Loving' and smitten with an inordinate passion for an indifferent lady, is an immobilized Will. As the loving or desiring faculty that may turn toward or away from objects worthy of attachment, Amans languishes in a hopeless yearning. Weeping hysterically over the blossoms of May in Book I, Amans disregards what is good and cannot, therefore, activate the Intelligence to argue for it. That this disjunction between the Intelligence and the Will produces miscommunication is evident in Amans's memory of his first words with the priest. 'Betwen the lif and deth I herde | This Prestes tale er I answerde', he remembers, describing himself as so distant that he could neither respond appropriately to Genius nor thoroughly report what the priest said (I.289–90). In order for these two characters to produce effective speech and respond to it, Amans must be emotionally induced to recognize the good and then motivate Genius to describe it. Only then can the Will and the Intellect operate in tandem, not only for clearer internal communication and personal growth, but also for better public discourse.

Once the confession reaches completion and Genius has shiven Amans of each of the mortal sins, the two begin to speak to each other openly about their psycho-allegorical relationship. Amans is openly frustrated that the priest's advice has done nothing to secure his lady, and Genius is patiently advising the lover to abandon a bootless pursuit: the priest enjoins the lover to 'withdrawe | And set thin herte under that lawe, | The which of reson is governed | And nocht of will' (VIII.2133–36). Reason might be rehabilitated, Genius goes on to remind Amans, by studying the examples provided in the tales. Yet Amans continues to declare the confessional exempla irrelevant to his purposes and begs Genius to deliver a supplication to Venus. When the goddess responds to the lover's entreaty by vilifying his old age and reminding him that 'loves lust and lockes hore | In chambre acorden nevermore', she leads Amans to despair of his lady (VIII. 2403–04). This is the moment described by Giles of Rome in his *Commentary* on Book II of the *Rhetoric* when passion moves the Will toward the Intellect. Shaken by despair, Amans, the Will, sways Genius, the Intelligence to perceive and articulate what would be good for an old man — prayerful contemplation. The lover asks the priest's final blessing upon a new love object, a pair of black prayer beads, and Genius concludes, 'Sone, as of thi schrifte | Thou has ful pardoun and foryifte; | For yet it thou and so wol I' (VIII.2895–97). Drawing the Intelligence into a retired, meditative life, Amans declares that although

his 'wittes straied', he 'gan to clepe hem hom ayein' (VIII.2859–60). And so the confession ends in forgiveness for internal division: the Will and the Intellect become one.

The unification of Genius and Amans into the wiser, more contemplative narrator John Gower is the end result of the Aristotelian rhetoric that operates in the poem's narratives. An ethical speaker, delivering his instructions in plain, honest language, eventually persuades his audience of the truth — that the codes of love's court have been violated too often by the lover for success with the lady. Shocked into realizing that he is not of love's 'kynde', Amans reunites with his Reason and emerges the venerable poet. This process, however, reflects not only the private maturing of one soul or the way in which individuals ideally respond to rhetoric, but also the preparation of a prince for public discourse. As Genius remarks to Amans,

conseil passeth alle thing  
To him which thenkth to ben a king;  
And every man for his partie  
A kingdom hath to justefie

(VIII.2109–12)

Because the narrator of the *Confessio Amantis* has returned to self-rule, he might ponder the kingdom's rule and once again provide good counsel. In both versions of the Epilogue, he prays for peace. While in the first version he praises Richard II for virtues that command a well-ordered kingdom (Richard exhibits 'Justice medled with pite | Largesce forth with charite'; VIII.2989–90), in the second version, the narrator returns to the Prologue's repudiation of misdeeds that divide the kingdom and the resulting need for the King's governance. In these circumstances, 'wisdom goth aweie [as it had for Amans] | And can nought se the ryhte weie | How to governe his oghne estate, | Bot everyday stant in debat (VIII.3147–50).

'Debat' is the destructive speech of conflict, while rhetoric is the master discourse of truth and peace. While dialectic must dispute the truth until synthesis is achieved in a logical syllogism, rhetoric is the persuasive art of convincing others of what is right under present circumstances. Through Aristotelian rhetoric, mediated by Giles of Rome, John Gower modelled a psychomachia of persuasion and taught in the 'Rethorique' section of Book VII its high principles. Like Roger Bacon, Giles of Rome, and later Francis Bacon, Gower in the *Confessio Amantis* preserves an Aristotelian form of discourse that heals the soul and offers hope to the kingdom.



## PAST AND PRESENT: GOWER'S USE OF OLD BOOKS IN *VOX CLAMANTIS*

Malte Urban

King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a composite statue as it is found in the biblical Book of Daniel appears twice in John Gower's poetry. It features prominently in the Prologue of the *Confessio Amantis* (585–662) and is the central image of the closing book of the earlier *Vox Clamantis*. The *Vox* establishes a clear link between the statue and contemporary society, when Gower's narrator exclaims that 'Vlta per terras superest modo fictilis etas | Vnde pedes statue dant michi signa fore' (The last age, that of clay is at hand throughout the world. The feet of the statue furnish me signs of it; VII.3.135–36).<sup>1</sup> Of course, the feet are the only parts of the statue that are still intact, since 'Nunc caput a statua Nabugod prescinditur auri | Fictilis et ferri stant duo iamque pedes' (The golden head of Nebuchadnezzar's statue has now been cut off, yet the two feet of iron and clay still stand; VII.1.5–6). This image illustrates several of the key elements of Gower's poetics and politics in the *Vox*. It has been argued that Gower sees historical development as both severely disrupted (a cut-off head cannot be sewn back on) and nearing its preordained end (the age of clay is

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the *Vox* are taken from *The Latin Works of John Gower*, ed. by George C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902). Translations are taken from *The Major Latin Works of John Gower: The Voice of One Crying and the Tripartite Chronicle*, trans. by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962). Stockton's prose translation is beginning to show its age, but in the absence of a much-needed verse translation, Stockton's remains the only complete translation of the *Vox*. For an indicator of how a verse translation could help our understanding of Gower's poem, see the excellent translations of individual passages in Siân Echard, 'Gower's "bokes of Latin": Language, Politics, and Poetry', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 25 (2003), 123–56.

the last age);<sup>2</sup> Gower's society can be seen as just as monstrous as the headless statue;<sup>3</sup> Gower's poetics are just as fragmented as Nebuchadnezzar's statue, in the sense that Gower incorporates a host of lines from texts other than his own into the body of his poem.<sup>4</sup>

This essay offers a reading of old books, the past, and the present in the *Vox* as informed by a cultural agenda that sees the present as corrupted in the sense that it still carries at least traces of the qualities of the past, but seems to have lost all cultural memory of these traces. In my view, Gower is offering a thorough indictment of his contemporaries, but one that holds up the image of the past as a model for a return to social harmony Gower sees jeopardized by the events of the Rising of 1381.<sup>5</sup> Especially the portrayal of the rebels of 1381 in relation to the rest of society makes Gower's agenda seem much less 'entirely predictable' than, for example, David Aers would have us believe.<sup>6</sup> Temporalities in the *Vox* are severely fragmented and all but obstruct any attempt to construct a straightforward politics for the poem. In order to better understand Gower's strategy of using old books for political purposes of the present I want to examine the *Vox* in the light of Walter Benjamin's concept of cultural history. As I will show, Gower's political alignment does not fit Benjamin's, but there are intersections

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive reading of apocalyptic aspects of Gower's poem is provided in Russell A. Peck, 'John Gower and the Book of Daniel', in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), pp. 159–87.

<sup>3</sup> For an informative reading of monstrosity in the *Vox*, see Eve Salisbury, 'Remembering Origins: Gower's Monstrous Body Poetic', in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. by Robert F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus, 1998), pp. 159–84.

<sup>4</sup> Gower's editor, G. C. Macaulay, accused Gower of 'schoolboy plagiarism' (*The Latin Works of John Gower*, p. xxxii), but in recent years, much more favourable appraisals of Gower's poetics have been suggested, perhaps most significantly the comparison of Gower's poetics and *cento* technique provided in Robert F. Yeager, 'Did Gower Write *Cento*?', in *John Gower: Recent Readings* (see n. 2, above), pp. 113–32.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'Rising of 1381' as opposed to the more traditional 'Peasants' Revolt' in order to account for the heterogeneous make up of the rebels. For example, Thomas Walsingham says of the rebels' entry into London that 'the common people of the city and especially the poor favoured the rustics and stopped the mayor from closing the gates' (Quoted in *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, ed. by R. B. Dobson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 168–69). In addition, there is no clearly definable common cause for the revolt. See, John A. F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England: 1370–1529* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 25; Miri Rubin, *The Hollow Crown: A History of Britain in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 31.

in both writers' works with regard to their treatment of the past (in the form of old books), specifically in both writers' focus on the fragmentary nature of their cultural past.<sup>7</sup>

Although Benjamin nowhere gives a clear definition of cultural history in his fragmented oeuvre, it is beyond doubt that Benjamin was diametrically opposed to the Rankean historicist idea of history as progress.<sup>8</sup> Instead, as he argues in the seventh of his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', a materialist reading of the past is needed that 'brushes history against the grain',<sup>9</sup> thereby puncturing the narrative of historical progress imposed by the victors.<sup>10</sup> The key opposition Benjamin sets up between historicism and his aimed for historical materialism is that between historicism's experience *of* the past and materialism's experience *with* the past. Essentially, in Benjamin's practice 'the historical object ceases to be an object *of* and becomes a participant *in* an historical experience'.<sup>11</sup> One of the main concepts Benjamin employs to achieve such a reading is that of the 'monad'. This, too, is explained in the 'Theses':

When thinking suddenly stops in a constellation pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock by which it crystallizes into a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad.<sup>12</sup>

This crystallising of tensions into images is key to Benjamin's project, and his oeuvre as a whole suggests that these monads are to be treated in a specific way by a historical materialist. As Max Pensky explains, Benjamin expects these images to be 'rescued from aesthetic discourses and endowed with a shocking, that is to say

<sup>7</sup> This admittedly anachronistic approach is justified insofar as Gower himself forces texts out of their historical context and reinscribes them in his present *after* he has submitted them to an interpretive process that takes his present as the primary factor in creating meaning out of his source texts.

<sup>8</sup> It could even be argued that Benjamin implies that only the destruction of traditional cultural history can bring about its revolution. See Irving Wohlfarth, 'Smashing the Kaleidoscope: Walter Benjamin's Critique of Cultural History', in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 190–205 (p. 198).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245–55 (p. 248).

<sup>10</sup> Also in the seventh thesis Benjamin famously proclaims that there is no 'document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 248).

<sup>11</sup> Howard Caygill, 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Cultural History', in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. by David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 73–96 (p. 90).

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 254.

a politically effective power'.<sup>13</sup> The bearing of this process on Gower's poetics in the *Vox*, especially Gower's representation of Nebuchadnezzar's statue, will become clear below, but first we should turn our attention to one of the most well known Benjaminian images.

One of the paintings in Benjamin's personal collection was *Angelus Novus* by Paul Klee. This painting provides the basis for the ninth of Benjamin's 'Theses':

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>14</sup>

Benjamin's angel is trapped in his present and can neither recover the past nor foresee the future. He can only perceive the ever-growing pile of debris that builds up in front of his eyes, while he himself is violently propelled into a future to which his back is turned. This description of the angel of history poses the question of how the course of history can be influenced if the angel — and we as humans for that matter — cannot leave the immediate present, be it backward in time or forward into the unknowable future. The past is lost and the future closed to his gaze, no matter how hard the angel struggles against the storm blowing from paradise.

The somewhat striking mixture between utopianism (in the sense that the angel wants to create a perfect future) and the impotent pessimism we find in the description of the angel of history is central to Benjamin's thinking.<sup>15</sup> In his *Vox* Gower creates a similar scene to that of Benjamin's angel. Gower's narrator is deeply concerned about the survival of his society/civilization in the face of recent catastrophic events, which is remarkably similar to Benjamin's fear that the Second World War would inevitably lead to a destruction of civiliza-

<sup>13</sup> Max Pensky, 'Method and Time: Benjamin's Dialectical Images', in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (see n. 11, above), pp. 177–98 (p. 179).

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses', p. 249.

<sup>15</sup> For the angel's impotence, see Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto, 2000), p. 202.

tion.<sup>16</sup> The narrator of the *Vox* finds himself in a position in history where he is cut off from a perceived Golden Age and is concerned about his and his society's progress into the future. Throughout the poem, the present of late fourteenth-century England is juxtaposed with this lost past, characterized by adherence to early Christian rules and virtues. Still, in the last instance Gower is as powerless as Benjamin's angel in the face of the force of history.

Whereas Benjamin, as a Marxist thinker, is primarily concerned with the empowerment of the working class in the face of bourgeois oppression, Gower does not, of course, possess such notions. The *Vox* is, in its entirety, one of the most powerful poetic indictments of *all* parts of society, one that for the most part utilizes the widespread estates satire genre.<sup>17</sup> Eve Salisbury even goes as far as to suggest that 'of the poetry of the time, it alone cries from the wilderness in an attempt to unveil the corrupt political structures from which the monstrous events of the Rising of 1381 emerge'.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the *Vox* is both about the social corruption that lead to the Rising of 1381 and about the fateful events of the Rising itself, as Gower presents them in the graphic nightmare *visio* of the first book of his poem.

In fact, the textual history of the *Vox* is an interesting case in point when it comes to the kind of historical development (or the case for the absence of such a development) that is presented in the poem itself. There are eleven extant manuscripts of the *Vox*, only one of which does *not* have the *visio* of 1381 as its opening.<sup>19</sup> We can now be fairly sure that Gower put this early version of his poem into circulation before 1381, and then added what we now know as Book I to create the poem that we read today. In addition, he then went back to his poem to change a few shorter passages describing King Richard and the Great Schism, effectively making his text evolve with its time.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the structure of the *Vox*

<sup>16</sup> Julian Roberts is puzzled by the fact that Benjamin remained in his exile in Paris even after the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939, and despite his strong belief that the next war would bring civilization to an end (Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 19).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the genre of the medieval estates satire, see Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Salisbury, 'Remembering Origins', p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> For a list of manuscripts of the *Vox*, see *The Latin Works of John Gower*, pp. lix–lxxi.

<sup>20</sup> On Gower's revisions of the *Vox*, see *Major Latin Works*, pp. 11–17; John Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 102–04. In a sense, the *Cronica tripertita*, an unfavourable account of the reign of Richard II written after the ascension to the throne of Henry IV functions as a kind of extension to the *Vox* beyond 1381.

as we read it did not evolve in a linear way, but presents the corruption of English society in the latter years of Edward III and the early years under Richard II *after* it confronts its readers with the dire consequences as they manifested themselves in 1381. This overarching distortion of linear development is mirrored on the textual level of the verses themselves.

The juxtaposition of idealized past and corrupted present is an integral part of Gower's view of history that stresses the difference between the past and the present, highlighting a rupture that has all but destroyed the teleological development of history. According to John Fisher, the *visio* of Book I is 'not history but a poet-philosopher's meditation on the meaning of history'.<sup>21</sup> However, could Gower, or anyone, write history without thinking about the meaning of that very history? I regard the *Vox* as both Gower's meditation on the meaning of history and his literary account of what he regards as significant in the history of England in the 1370s and 1380s. Gower is trying to make sense of his contemporary history by providing a coherent account of the time up to the Rising of 1381. Book I employs the Rising of 1381 to illustrate the urgency of Gower's sociopolitical criticism in Books II–VII that had already been put into circulation. Gower singles out one particular stretch of time for his narrative instead of the all-encompassing teleological account Fisher seems to expect from a work of history. Book I describes the events of the summer of 1381, which Gower probably witnessed directly, living in Southwark at the time of the Rising, against the idealized horizon of the lost past, in order to show how far his society has strayed from the path prepared by that past.<sup>22</sup>

Building upon this conception of history, the tenor of the poem is deeply apocalyptic.<sup>23</sup> An early indicator can be found in the prologue to Book I: 'Insula quem Pathmos suscepit in Apocalipsi, | Cuius ego nomen gesto, gubernet opus (May the one whom the Isle of Pathmos received in the Apocalypse, and whose name I bear, guide this work; I.Prol.57–58). This invocation of the author of the biblical Apocalypse, John of Pathmos, firmly lays the ground for Gower's criticism

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, *John Gower*, p. 173.

<sup>22</sup> For the significance of Gower's firsthand experience of Southwark for his literary works, see John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, *Armiger, Poeta*: Records and Memorials of his Life and Death', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 23–41; Robert Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts', *ibid.*, pp. 43–60.

<sup>23</sup> James M. Dean, *The World Grown Old in Later Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1997), p. 244; Peck, 'Book of Daniel'.

of the sociopolitical context in which Gower finds himself trapped. As Russell Peck argues, the invocation is combined with the guardian angel, Gower's enigmatic identification of himself, and the similarities between the *Vox* and the Book of Daniel to create Gower's apocalyptic perspective.<sup>24</sup> Gower portrays himself as the *vox clamantis in deserto*, the voice crying in the wilderness, warning his contemporaries of the dire consequences of their corrupted way of life, but he does so in order to avert these consequences, echoing Benjamin's angel's attempt to 'make whole what has been smashed'. Gower wants to re-establish the lost link between his present and the idealized past by invoking the past authority of John of Patmos.

Book I is by far the most graphic illustration of the apocalyptic tenor of the poem. The world Gower presents here is thoroughly turned upside down and a return to Gower's idealized past as he presents it in the Edenic state of the beginning of the poem seems all but impossible. However, we should not ignore the status of Book I as a late addition to the poem and rather read it as a more graphic manifestation of the pessimistic outlook that features in the remaining six books, most notably the description of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the composite statue as found in the Book of Daniel. Gower would later come back to this statue in the Prologue of the *Confessio Amantis* (585–662), and in the *Vox* he employs this image to open the summary of the ills affecting his society as he has described them in the preceding books. The opening chapter of Book VII starts with a further emphasis on the significance of the past for the present:

Quod solet antiquis nuper latitare figuris,  
Possumus ex nostris verificare malis:  
Quod veteres fusca sompni timuere sub vmbra,  
Iam monstrat casus peruigil ecce nouus.  
Nunc caput a statua Nabugod prescinditur auri,  
Fictilis et ferri stant duo iamque pedes:

(VII.1.1–6)

(We can establish from our own evils what is wont to lie concealed in ancient symbols. The ever-active misfortune of modern times reveals what the ancients were fearful of under the dark shadow of sleep. The golden head of Nebuchadnezzar's statue has now been cut off, yet the two feet of iron and clay still stand.)

What started out as itself a dream in Book I is here portrayed as a daylight enactment of the sleeping fears of ancient times. Gower presents himself and his

<sup>24</sup> Peck, 'Book of Daniel', pp. 167–69.

contemporaries as living inside the dreams-turned-reality of biblical writings, which in return enables him to understand more fully the matter contained in the writings of the past. In the post-1381 version of the poem, Book VII thus closes a circle that starts with the *visio* of Book I and then deals with the corruption of the ideals of the past that affects all parts of society.

It is highly significant for my understanding of Gower's view of history in the *Vox* that he does not once mention the statue's torso. The focus throughout is placed solely on the cut-off golden head representing the lost Golden Age and the imminent last age of clay. Gower mentions the clay feet of the statue at the beginning of the third chapter of Book VII:

Vltilma per terras superest modo fictilis etas,  
Vnde pedes statue dant michi signa fore.  
Non cicius figuli fragilis nam fictilis olla  
Rupta fit in testas, dum lapis angit eas,  
Quin plus condicio fragilis temptata virorum  
Rupta iacet vicii de gratuitate sui.

(VII.3.135–40)

(The last age, that of clay is at hand throughout the world. The feet of the statue furnish me signs of it. When a storm strikes it, the potter's frail pot of clay is not broken into fragments more quickly than man's frail nature lies broken, by the weight of its sin.)

Humans are here likened to their own frail products, alienated from themselves, with their nature lying crushed by the weight of their sins. The focus on the last age, the *ultima etas*, echoes the apocalyptic tenor of the poem as a whole, and the fact that Gower explicitly refers to the pot of clay that 'Rupta fit in testas', is broken into fragments, echoes the lament throughout the poem of the severely corrupted state of Gower's contemporary society. The implications seems to be that when the present's ties with its originary past are this easily broken, when history is fragmented, it is only a matter of time until society itself is irreversibly crushed — just as the 'potter's frail pot of clay' — and becomes a part of the ever-growing pile of debris accumulating in front of Benjamin's angel of history.

The erasure of the middle section of the statue and the linking of the clay feet with the age of clay adds to Gower's focus on the perceived rupture separating his present from the idealized past, with the absent torso highlighting the absence of the vital connection between past and present. Just as the remaining parts of the statue do not feature in the poem, so Gower does not describe the individual steps that led to the corruption of his society, but only provides a criticism of the end product and its effects on the link between past and present. Nebuchadnezzar's

statue is often read as a metaphor for the body politic. Eve Salisbury, for example, argues that the monstrous statue with its head cut off and only the feet remaining illustrates the monstrosity of Gower's society.<sup>25</sup> However, there is another dimension to Gower's use of the statue. Read against the strategy of juxtaposing the extremes of distant past and immediate present, the emphasis on the upper and lower parts of the statue becomes a powerful graphic embodiment of Gower's theory of history. Openly linking the clay feet with the age of clay and contrasting it with the cut-off golden head, Gower uses the widely accepted link between the statue and the body politic to illustrate how the threat to the body politic posed not only by the Rising of 1381 but also by the corruption raging rampant in society is facilitated by the rupture separating his present from its originary past.

This rupture between past and present and Gower's attempt to 'make whole what has been smashed' is also illustrated by the numerous quotations of lines and even whole passages from older works that he weaves into the poem. Recent reappraisals of Gower's technique have shown that Gower's *Vox* exhibits a sophisticated poetics. Robert Yeager's analysis of the striking similarities between Gower's technique and the classical rhetorical style of *cento* writing has paved the way for further studies linking Gower's poetics with his narrative matter in the poem.<sup>26</sup> I would argue that Gower's use of his sources is informed by his theory of history, and that the numerous borrowed lines and passages in the poem echo the juxtaposition of past and present. The presence of older writings in the *Vox* highlights the rupture between past and present insofar as it reminds Gower's audience of the virtues of their predecessors. In Ausonius's words, *cento* involves merging 'scattered tags [...] into a whole to harmonise different meanings, to make pieces arbitrarily connected seem naturally related, to let foreign elements show no chink of light between, to prevent the far-fetched from proclaiming the force which united them'.<sup>27</sup> This definition does not fit Gower's poetic method in the *Vox*. His selection and incorporation of source material can be read as inflated with meaning, and this meaning is provided by the theory of history that relies on the

<sup>25</sup> Salisbury, 'Remembering Origins', p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> Yeager, 'Did Gower Write *Cento*?'. For examples of readings of the *Vox* that build on Yeager's findings, see Andrew Galloway, 'Gower in his Most Learned Role and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381', *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993), 329–47; Bruce Harbert, 'Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower', in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 83–97; Salisbury, 'Remembering Origins'.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted and translated in Yeager, 'Did Gower Write *Cento*?', p. 115.

juxtaposition of past and present, old and new. In the *Vox*, Gower is aware of his text as a tissue of quotations and he consciously uses his sources and their contrast with his original lines as a textual element of his theory of history.

However, Gower does conform to Ausonius's rule that the 'foreign elements show no chink of light between' insofar as he splices his varied sources skilfully into his own verses, making the quotations obvious only for those readers of the *Vox* who share Gower's thorough knowledge of Latin texts. There can be no doubt that Gower was a very bookish poet,<sup>28</sup> and his audience has to match this bookishness in order to realize the scope of Gower's borrowing technique. But Gower does not hide the fact that he does rely heavily on his sources, but rather makes it clear from the beginning of both the six- and seven-book versions of the poem, as the following examples illustrate:

Scripture veteris capiunt exempla futuri,  
Nam dabit experta res magis esse fidem.  
(I.Prol.1–2)

(Writings of the past contain fit examples for the future, for a thing which has previously been experienced will produce greater faith.)

Doctorum veterum mea carmina fortificando  
Pluribus exemplis scripta fuisse reor.  
(II.Prol.81–82)

(I acknowledge that my verses have been written with many models and strengthened by learned men of old.)

In addition to informing readers of the presence of older writings in Gower's poem, these two couplets also prepare us for the juxtaposition of old and new, past and present, which is a key element throughout the *Vox*, and is necessary for the creation of the historical depth Gower needs to mount his critique of English society in the 1370s and 1380s.<sup>29</sup> For my present purpose, we should note that Gower is here foreshadowing his reference to the sleeping fears of the ancients. Essentially, the sources strengthen Gower's verses, but they can also be better understood with the benefit of historical hindsight and the present experience of Gower's contemporary society.

Near the beginning of Book I, Gower creates a particularly idyllic scenery that can be regarded as his view of the idealized past that has been lost by 1381:

<sup>28</sup> Echard, 'Gower's "bokes of Latin"', p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Galloway, 'Gower in his Most Learned Role', p. 335.

Omina tunc florent, tunc est noua temporis etas,  
 Ludit et in pratis luxuriando pecus.  
 Tunc fecundus ager, pecorum tunc hora creandi  
 Tunc renouatque suos reptile quodque iocos  
 (1.1.33–36)

(Then everything flourished, then there was a new epoch of time, and the cattle sported wantonly in the fields. Then the land was fertile, then was the hour of the herds to mate, and it was then that the reptile might renew its sports.)

The first three of these lines are taken from various parts of Ovid's *Fasti*, a description of the Roman Saturnalia. The fourth line, implicitly referring to the snake's role in Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, is Gower's own, and I would argue that Gower here implies that no matter how idyllic earthly life seems to be, there is always a strong undercurrent of subversion and loss of faith.

The paradisal setting is short-lived, and duly blasted away by

Innumerabilia monstra timenda nimis,  
 Diuersas plebis sortes vulgaris iniquas  
 Innumeris turmis ire per se arua vagas:  
 (1.2.170–72)

(innumerable terrifying monsters, various rascally bands of the common mob, wandering through the fields in countless throngs.)

Eve Salisbury provides a convincing reading of this element in the *Vox*, arguing that it bears a strong resemblance to Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of the work of Rabelais.<sup>30</sup> For Bakhtin, the Roman Saturnalia with their conjuring up of a lost Golden Age are an influence for the medieval feast days:

The gay aspect of the feast presented this happier future of a general material affluence, equality, and freedom, just as the Roman Saturnalia announced the return of the Golden Age. Thus, the medieval feast had, as it were, the two faces of Janus. Its official, ecclesiastical face was turned to the past and sanctioned the existing order, but the face of the people of the marketplace looked into the future and laughed, attending the funeral of the past and present. The marketplace feast opposed the protective, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Salisbury, 'Remembering Origins', p. 168.

<sup>31</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), p. 81.

The fact that the rebels entered London on the day of Corpus Christi is important for our understanding of Bakhtin's statement in relation to Gower's representation of the paradisal setting and its destruction by the *plebis*. Gower prefaces the destruction of the Golden Age and the common mob's attendance at the funeral of the past and present with a prolonged description of precisely that Golden Age, effectively sanctioning the existing order. In this respect, Gower's borrowings from Ovid strengthen his juxtaposition of past and present, highlighting the rupture between them. The fact that the rebels are turned from humans into unreasoning beasts is another sign of the corruption affecting society. Because the present society is so distanced from its former glory, the rebels as members of that society are no longer seen as human.

Considering this Janus-faced quality of the rebels' actions, it is worth looking at the way in which Gower himself creates intersections between past and present in his poem. Ancient Troy, with its close ties to medieval English history and self-definition, is prominent throughout Book I of the *Vox*.<sup>32</sup> Troy effectively becomes one of the exemplary cases Gower brings forward in the *Vox* in order to illustrate the difference between his idealized past and his present. However, Gower does not ignore the fact that Troy itself fell because of its moral failures and shortcomings, but rather employs it as an already flawed society that nonetheless is inherently preferable to the all-pervasive corruption he perceives in his own society. Furthermore, Gower's inclusion of the Troy myth in his account of the Rising of 1381 can be read as an attempt to counter the rebels' agenda of destroying written records curtailing their freedoms and rights. The very fact that Gower reinscribes one of the main elements of authoritative literary and historical discourse in medieval England illustrates the extent to which he wants to reassert the authority of writing and with it the traditional social order, albeit in the already fallen guise of ancient Troy.

<sup>32</sup> For the importance of Troy in Medieval England, see Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 38 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); James Simpson, 'The Other Book of Troy: Guido dell Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England', *Speculum*, 72 (1998), 397–423; Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 84–164. Elsewhere, I have discussed the implications of the Troy myth in Chaucer's politics and poetics in *Troilus and Criseyde* (Malte Urban, 'Myth and the Present: Chaucer's *Troilus* as a Mirror for Ricardian England', in *Riddles, Knights and Cross-dressing Saints: Essays on Medieval English Language and Literature*, ed. by Thomas Honegger, Collection Variations, 5 (Bern: Lang, 2004), pp. 33–54).

The rebels' entry into London is central to Gower's account of the Rising, and in Chapter 13 of Book I his narrator describes the event in the following graphic terms:

A dextrisque nouam me tunc vidisse putabam  
 Troiam, que vidue languida more fuit:  
 Que solet ex muris cingi patuit sine muro,  
 Nec potuit seras claudere porta suas.  
 Mille lupi mixtique lupis vrsi gradientes  
 A siluis statuunt vrbis adire domos:

(I.13.879–84)

(On my right then I thought I saw New Troy, which was powerless as a widow. Ordinarily surrounded by walls, it lay exposed as a widow, and the city gate could not shut its bars. A thousand wolves and bears approaching with the wolves determined to go out of the woods to the homes of the city.)

Federico emphasizes the sexual imagery contained in the reference to New Troy as a defenceless widow,<sup>33</sup> but I am here more interested in Gower's use of the New Troy-London analogy. The headnote to this chapter tells us that the rebels 'entered New Troy — that is the city of London'. By explicitly referring to the analogy, Gower makes sure that the account of what happened next is not lost on his audience; the headnote acts as an interpretive aid for an audience that Gower needs to be unfailingly aware of the analogy he is about to exploit. The opening reference to the city gate that 'could not shut its bars' resembles the original Troy, whose city walls had been torn down in order to get the wooden horse into the city, a story Gower was later to incorporate into the *Confessio Amantis* (I.1077–1209). The account of the ravaging of New Troy by the rebels relies on this self-destructive element in the ancient story of Troy, as the narrator exclaims: 'Omnia traduntur, postes reserauimus hosti | Et fit in infida podicione fides' (We unlocked our doors to the enemy and faith was kept only in faithless treason; I.13.903–04). This line fits in with Gower's strategy in the *Vox* as a whole to implicate not only the rebels but also the other constituent parts of his society which is also echoed when the narrator laments 'denaturans vrbis natura prioris | Que vulgi furias arma mouere sinis!' (O the degenerate nature of our former city, which allowed the madly raging rabble to take up arms! I.13.979–80). Echoing the self-destructive aspect of the Trojan story, Gower thus presents the rebels entrance into London as partly self-inflicted. This complicity of the

<sup>33</sup> Federico, *New Troy*, pp. 8–9.

Londoners in the Rising of 1381 is also condemned in Walsingham's chronicle, and after the Rising had been quelled, a number of aldermen were accused of aiding the Rebels' entry into London.<sup>34</sup>

One contributing factor to the initial success of the Rising was the striking inactivity on the part of those who were supposed to defend the city against the intruders, echoing Troy's fate.

Ecce senem Calcas, cuius sapientia maior  
 Omnibus est, nullum tunc sapuisse modum:  
 Anthenor ex pactis componere federa pacis  
 Tunc nequit, immo furor omne resolut opus:  
 A vecorde probum non tunc distanca nouit,  
 Fit cor Tersitis et Diomedis idem:  
 Lingue composite verbis nil rhetor Vluxes  
 Tunc valuit, nec ei sermo beatus erat:

(1.13.961–68)

(Behold, even the old man Calchas, whose wisdom was greater than everyone's, then knew no course of action. Antenor did not know then by what means to arrange peace treaties; instead the great frenzy destroyed all his efforts. No difference marked the worthy man from the foolish: Thersites' heart became the same as Diomedes'. The orator Ulysses was then of no help with his words of well chosen speech, and blessed discourse was not his.])

The significance of this passage in relation to my discussion of the *Vox* lies less in possible links between the Trojan and Greek characters Gower lists here than in his emphasis on wisdom, negotiation, and discourse. According to the legend, Calchas deserted Troy at an early stage in the siege, because he, as Chaucer states 'wel wiste he by sort that Troye sholde | Destroyed ben' (*Troilus*, I.76–77),<sup>35</sup> and Antenor, again according to Chaucer, was later to become a 'traitour to the town' (*Troilus*, IV.204). Together with Ulysses's loss of 'blessed discourse', the references to Antenor and Calchas illustrate the inability of humans to influence and fully comprehend the course of history. In Chaucer's *Troilus*, Calchas knows that Troy will fall, but he cannot avert the downfall, and Antenor makes his fellow Trojans believe that he has negotiated a peace treaty, but they fail to realize that this treaty is insincere. Essentially, Gower's fellow Londoners are just as caught up in their

<sup>34</sup> For Walsingham, see *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, pp. 168–69. The trials of the aldermen are discussed, in relation to Chaucer's *Troilus*, in Marion Turner, 'Troilus and Criseyde and the "Treasonous Aldermen" of 1382: Tales of the City in Late Fourteenth-Century London', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 25 (2003), 225–57.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

destructive fate as were the Trojans, but Gower stresses that even compared to Trojans of little merit his contemporary London fails.

In fact, Gower presents London as a lesser image of Troy that is once again being ransacked by intruders who are not being met by an adequate display of force and moral integrity:

Subdita Troiana cecidit victoria victa,  
Troiaque preda fero fit velut agna lupo.  
Rusticus agreditur, miles nec in vrbe resistit,  
Hectore Troia caret, Argos Achille suo:  
Hectoris aut Troili nil tunc audacia vicit,  
Quin magis hii victi rem sine corde sinunt;  
Nec solito Priamus fulsit tunc liber honore,  
Set patitur dominus quid sibi seruus agat.

(1.13.989–96)

(The Trojan victory was lost in defeat, and Troy became a prey to the wild beast, just like a lamb to the wolf. The peasant attacked and the knight in the city did not resist; Troy was without a Hector, Argos without its Achilles. No boldness of a Hector or a Troilus defeated anything then, but instead those who were defeated suffered the whole affair without courage. Priam did not shine then with his usual honor; instead the master put up with whatever the servant did to him.)

Just as Hector and Troilus were slain during the final stages of the siege, so London has nothing to offer against the onslaught of the rebels. With the absence of any outstanding warriors, the defenders of the city lose their courage, and the social hierarchy is turned upside down, with Priam's loss of honour metonymic for the degeneration of the aristocracy in London.

Gower's description of the execution of Simon Sudbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury, combines his criticism of the upper strata of Ricardian society with the question of human foreknowledge of the future. The headnote to the chapter in question explains that 'Hic tracta secundum visionem sompnii, quasi per figuram, de morte Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi' (Here he treats, as if through a symbol, of the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury, according to the vision of his dream; I.xiv). Helenus was, of course, one of the many Trojans who eventually turned against their city, when he passed on the Palladium to Antenor, and he was also one of the seers who knew about the eventual downfall of the city. In this sense, Gower's choice of Helenus as analogy for Sudbury is not as ill-chosen as Stockton assumes.<sup>36</sup> True, Sudbury did not have the divining abilities

<sup>36</sup> *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, p. 358.

of Helenus, and he was not related to the royal family as Helenus was, but considering Gower's subsequent criticism of the ecclesiastic orders in the *Vox*, it is obvious that Gower takes Sudbury as largely responsible for his own fate and the moral decline of English society as a whole. Federico argues that Gower here 'surprisingly, reasserts the rebels' interpretation of treason by figuring Sudbury as Helenus'.<sup>37</sup> Federico then, rightly, points out that Gower is essentially merely previewing his later criticism of the upper social strata in the poem, and I would argue that Gower is at this point engaged in a two-directional movement of condemning the rebels' actions and simultaneously referring to the widespread corruption in the upper social strata as the main reason behind the Rising.<sup>38</sup>

In the penultimate chapter of Book I, Gower once again returns to the legendary foundation of Britain. The rebellion has been suppressed; one of its leaders, Wat Tyler, put to the sword, but the ship on which the narrator finds himself is still in danger. It cannot find a peaceful harbour, and even when it is eventually thrown onto a landing place, the place is not peaceful. Embarking, the narrator learns from an old man that

'Exulis hec dici nuper solit Insula Brutii,  
 Quam sibi compaciens ipsa Diana dabat.  
 Huius enim terre gens hec est inchola, ritus  
 Cuius amore procul dissona plura tenet.  
 [...]   
 Non magis esse probos ad finem solis ab ortu  
 Estimo, si populi mutuus esset amor'.  
 (I.20.1963–82)

('This once used to be called the island of Brut, an exile. Diana gave it to him out of pity. The people of this land are wild. Their way of life involves far more quarrelling than love. [...] [Yet] I think there is no worthier people under the sun, if there were mutual love among them'.)

Having left London, the concentrated essence of the myth of Trojan origins, the narrator now encounters the myth in its most general form: the pagan exile Brutus, grandson of Aeneas. Gower thus goes back to the very point from which the myth of Britain's Trojan origins developed. In line with his emphasis on the perversion of his contemporary society and the theme of division and absence of

<sup>37</sup> Federico, *New Troy*, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> For a succinct analysis of Gower's criticism of the upper social strata, see Elizabeth Porter, 'Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm', in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 135–62.

mutual love, a theme that would a few years later become one of the guiding principles of his *Confessio*,<sup>39</sup> he laments the quarrels among Britons and stresses that this people would certainly be the worthiest, if only they found ‘mutual love among them’. Essentially, even before 1381 Britain was always already flawed, both in the sense of having lost the moral values of Gower’s idealized but no longer accessible past and by basing its mythical heritage on the city of Troy that fell because of its own moral shortcomings.

Given that the borrowed lines are a textual manifestation of Gower’s view of history and its juxtaposition of past and present, old and new, his narrator’s self-description as an unworthy person is important. In the prologue to Book II, the original introduction to the poem as a whole, he pleads:

Qui legis hec eciam, te supplico, vir, quod honeste  
 Scripta feras, viciis nec memor esto meis:  
 Rem non personam, mentem non corpus in ista  
 Suscipe material, sum miser ipse quia.

(II.Prol.11–4)

(Likewise I beg of you, the man who reads these writings, that you bear with them generously and not be too conscious of my faults. Embrace the matter, not the man, and the spirit, not the bodily form in this material, for I myself am a poor fellow.)

This is a clear example of the common humility *topos*, but in the *Vox* it is implicitly employed to situate Gower’s narrator against the horizon of older, more authoritative sources that are spliced into the narrative. The narrator is a ‘poor fellow’ compared to the masters of old and thus metonymic for his sociopolitical context. The present is an almost irredeemably corrupted version of the past, and Gower wants his society to be remodelled according to the traditional feudal order. Similarly, Gower’s poem has to rely heavily on the masters of the past to become at all valuable, illustrating the importance of reaching back across time, as Benjamin puts it to ‘awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed’.

I would like to conclude by returning to Gower’s depiction of and positioning against the rebels of 1381. Here, we have to remember that Gower is at pains to stress that he is speaking for English society as a whole, not solely out of his own personal impulse. For example, at the beginning of the prologue to Book III, his narrator exclaims:

<sup>39</sup> For one reading of division as a central theme in the *Confessio*, see Hugh White, ‘Division and Failure in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*’, *Neophilologus*, 72 (1988), 600–16.

A me non loquor hec, set que michi plebiss  
 Vox dedit, et sortem plangit vbique malam:  
 (III.Prol.11–12)

(I am not speaking of these things on my own part; rather, the voice of the people has reported them to me, and it complains of their adverse fate at every hand.)

Gower here presents his Latin poetic voice as a product of the voice of the people, a *plebs* who, we remember were depicted as ‘innumerable terrifying monsters, various rascally bands of the common mob’ in Book I (2.170–72). What, then, are we to make of Gower’s rendition of the *vox populi* in the rather un-plebeian Latin medium? He certainly does not propose to speak for the common mob that is depicted as a graphic example for the corruption of his society in relation to its originary past. Towards the end of Book VII, we encounter a further reference to this ominous *plebis vox*:

Quod scripsi plebis vox est, set et ista videbis,  
 Quo clamat populus, est ibi sepe deus.  
 (VII.25.1470–71)

(What I have set down is the voice of the people, but you will see that where the people call out, God is often there.)

Gower here utilizes the traditional identification of the *vox populi* with the *vox dei*, the voice of God.<sup>40</sup> Such an identification emphasizes the prophetic nature of the poem, lending it greater authority by presenting Gower’s account of the Rising of 1381 and his social criticism in Books I–VII as a textual manifestation of the voice of God, filtered through the fallible human agency of Gower as poet. Therefore, the narrator does not actually relate what the common mob has told him, but gets his primary inspiration from God, a fact that is already alluded to in the prologue to Book II, the original opening of the poem:

Incepturn per te perfecto fruactor  
 Hoc opus ad laudem nominis, oro, tui.  
 (II. Prol.9–10)

(I pray that this work, begun with Thy [Christ’s] help for the praise of Thy name, may achieve a fitting conclusion.)

<sup>40</sup> David Aers, ‘*Vox Populi* and the Literature of 1381’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 432–53 (p. 440); Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 210.

Gower conjures up the voice of the common people and simultaneously silences it by referring to the *vox dei* as the primary source for his material. This double movement is characteristic of the discourse of the ruling classes, who, as the chronicle evidence shows, vehemently tried to silence the voices of the governed populace.<sup>41</sup>

The double movement of conjuring up the common voice and striving to silence it at the same time can best be seen in the often quoted passage opening Chapter 11 of Book I, where Gower represents the rebels' voices within his Latin text:

Watte vocat, cui Thomme venit, neque Symme retardat,  
 Bette que Gibbe simul Hykke venire iubent:  
 Colle furit, quem Geffe iuuat, nocumenta parantes,  
 Cum quibus ad dampnum Wille coire vouet.  
 Grigge rapit, dum Dawe strepit, comes est quibus Hobbe,  
 Lorkyn et in medio non minor esse putat:  
 Hudde ferit, quos Iudde terit, dum Tebbe minatur,  
 Iakke domos que viros vellit et ense necat:  
 Hogge suam pompam vibrat, dum se putat omni  
 Maiores Rege nobilitate fore:  
 Balle propheta docet, quem spiritus ante malignus  
 Edocuit, que sua tunc fuit alta scola.

(1.11.783–94)

(Wat calls, Tom comes to him, and Sim does not loiter behind. Bet and Gib order Hick to come at once. Col rages, whom Geff helps to do damage. Will swears to join with them for mischief. Grigg grabs, while Daw roars and Hobb is their partner, and Lorkin intends no less to be in the thick of things. Hudd strikes while Tebb threatens those whom Judd tramples on. Jack tears down houses and kills men with his sword. Hogg brandishes his pomp, for with his noble bearing he thinks he is greater than any king. The prophet Ball teaches them; a malicious spirit had previously taught him, and he then constituted their deepest learning.)

I quote this passage in full because it illustrates the way in which Gower uses the enclosure of the rebels' speech in Latin in order to 'erase any traces of verbal performance on the part of the rebels'.<sup>42</sup> Essentially, Gower *has* to mention or at least

<sup>41</sup> Aers, 'Vox Populi'; Susan Crane, 'The Writing Lesson of 1381', in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 201–21; Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 32–56.

<sup>42</sup> Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, p. 213.

imply the humanness of the rebels, but the enclosure in Latin and the fact that the vernacular names of the rebels stand out from the rest of the passage serve him to highlight the fact that they are occupying a space that is not intended for them. Furthermore, the reference to the preacher John Ball suggests that the rebels learned their verbal performance from the very parts of society they are attacking, as David Aers points out.<sup>43</sup> Even more significantly, Gower stresses that Ball had been taught by a *spiritus malignus*, a malicious spirit, making his preaching a threat that infests not only the social system, but also the Latin language in which much of the official business of that system (and Gower's poem) are conducted.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, since Gower is writing from within the always already fallen human condition, his poetics and politics cannot help but produce certain contradictions. Gower strives to bring about a return to an idealized past, but the only way for him to first attain and then disseminate knowledge about that past is through the written text(s) of tradition, meaning that he has to rely on witnesses that are already tainted by their very humanness. I would argue that, in the last instance, Gower is aware of the relative futility of his project as he formulates it in the early version of the *Vox*, where he can only point out general flaws in his society, but cannot indict specific social agents. Would it be cynical, then, to argue that Gower might have felt a certain gratitude for the frightful events of 1381? If nothing else, the Rising served to very graphically illustrate to the ruling classes that they could not continue on their chosen path of oppressing the poor. Of course, in the long run the Rising did not achieve any of its central aims, as Gower would certainly be relieved to know, but the rebels' questioning of the social system by force is mirrored in Gower's poetic questioning of society and its almost aggressive highlighting of corruption. In this sense, Gower and his old books are implicated in both the rebels' and the *Vox*'s criticism (and vice versa). To return to Benjamin's angel: Gower picks up bits and pieces from the pile of debris before his eyes, but, as a part of history and humanity himself, he cannot help but contribute to the pile's growth by writing a new book that is itself shot through with elements of old books.

<sup>43</sup> Aers, 'Vox Populi', p. 442.

<sup>44</sup> Gower's awareness of the instability of Latin (and, by extension, all language) is discussed in Echard, 'Gower's "bokes of Latin"'.

## London Life and Texts



## ‘THE SLYESTE OF ALLE’: THE LOMBARD PROBLEM IN JOHN GOWER’S LONDON

Craig E. Bertolet

In his poetry, John Gower seems to be uniformly hostile to aliens in England, especially alien traders, such as the Flemish or French. But he levels his harshest criticism against the ‘Lombards’ (Gower’s term for all northern Italians) in both his *Mirour de l’Omme* and *Confessio Amantis*, alleging that they routinely cheat honest traders, hide behind the protection of indulgent English kings, and lend with usury.<sup>1</sup> Of all aliens, he concludes, the Lombards are ‘the slyeste of alle’ (*Confessio*, II.2102).<sup>2</sup> Anti-Lombard hostility, though, is not exceptional to Gower. It erupted in London periodically among the wool traders who found themselves threatened by Italian competition. One of the most intense periods of this hostility was the third quarter of the fourteenth century when Gower was writing the *Mirour*. Why did Gower and his contemporaries find the Lombards such a threat to their sense of order? Just as with virtually all issues in the City, London’s reaction in this case originates in its commerce. My approach here is essentially to read Gower’s comments against events in and around London from

<sup>1</sup> Gower’s term is not an entirely accurate one because most of the Italian traders were from Tuscany, Liguria, or Veneto, rather than Lombardy. Civic documents from London also used the term *Lombard* to refer to Italian merchants generally. Despite the inaccuracy of the term, for the sake of consistency I will follow Gower and London records, my principal primary sources, in referring to all Italian merchants in England as Lombards.

<sup>2</sup> John Gower, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899–1902). All citations from Gower’s texts in their original languages are taken from Macaulay’s edition. Cited translations from the *Mirour de l’Omme* (hereafter cited as *Mirour*) are from John Gower, *Mirour de l’Omme*, trans. by William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1992). All uncited translations from the *Mirour* are mine.

roughly 1350–80 as a means to explain why he singled out this particular alien group for condemnation.

The Lombards commanded more wealth than the other two large alien communities in London (the Flemings and the men of the Hanseatic League).<sup>3</sup> They lived in various parts of the City, often overstaying the maximum allotted time an alien could remain in London.<sup>4</sup> They also frequently made arrangements with the king in order to skirt London's customs' duties or its laws and, in some cases, were able to undersell native traders so that Londoners had a difficult time competing with them. At first, London welcomed the Italians and their trade.<sup>5</sup> But, by the middle decades of the fourteenth century, relations between London and the Lombards had deteriorated.

Gower does sympathize with his urban contemporaries. He includes a roughly sixty-line passage in his *Mirour* in which he outlines the vices of Italians (25429–88). His criticisms are the same ones that London merchants raised, as surviving City records show. Robert Epstein suggests that Gower's complaints are primarily directed against the Lombard bankers operating in the City and are 'very close to that of the city's ascendant merchant class'.<sup>6</sup> Gower was outraged, as were many Londoners, with the royal government's policy of accepting loans from Italians in exchange for trading concessions which harmed English merchants. But Gower directs his criticism not just at the bankers Epstein mentions; instead, the passage concerns all forms of commercial trade with the Italians, especially since it follows (and should be read in context with) a passage praising wool (25369–5428).

The connection between wool and Lombards is obvious when considering that the Lombards were the chief rivals of the native Londoners in the lucrative wool trade. This trade dominated London politics for much of the fourteenth century

<sup>3</sup> Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300–1500* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1948; repr. 1992), pp. 220–22.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Lesley Bradley records that many Italians resided in the northeastern section of the City. Bradley, 'The Italian Community in London, c. 1350–c. 1450' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1992), p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline M. Barron comments that 'Londoners, acting together or as individuals, accepted a measure of responsibility for creating an attractive commercial environment' (*London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200–1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 63). However, she describes later how, by 'dogged unpleasantry', the Londoners basically took over the wine trade from the Gascons who dominated it in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century (pp. 85–86).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), p. 50.

because many powerful Londoners were involved in it. London had become England's primary port for exporting wool, having won this supremacy away from Boston and Hull by about 1350.<sup>7</sup> Caroline M. Barron reports that, 'by 1362 about 45 per cent of all English wool was exported through the port of London and 70 per cent of this wool belonged to denizen merchants'.<sup>8</sup> This growth would have not become problematic if many of the Italian traders had not purchased licences from the king to avoid London's laws.

When Gower moves from praising wool to condemning Italians, he writes as a Londoner who accepts that the wool trade was important for both the City's and the kingdom's prosperity. The Lombards were successful traders, but Gower and his contemporaries would have seen this success come at the expense of English traders. Certainly, all Italians were not guilty of the dubious trade practices Gower catalogues, but the behaviour of a few poisoned popular opinion against them all, as we will see. Our first task will be to address the issue of anti-Italian hostility through the lens of two murders which characterize the level and universality of animosity in London.

### *Lombards in London, 1350–80*

Both murders are the result of frustrations with the royal government. The first murder occurred in 1370 and involved a notoriously fraudulent Luccan trader, Nicholas Sardouche, whom the king fined but did not expel, despite complaints by London's citizens. The second murder, the more problematic of the two, came nine years later and involved a man guilty of nothing except wanting to export wool from an English city other than London. This victim, Janus Imperiale, had come to England in 1378 on a mission from Genoa to Richard II's court having three stated goals: to buy wool, to obtain the release of a Genoese ship captured by two Londoners (the mayor, John Philipot, and a grocer named Richard Preston), and to negotiate a permanent commercial base in Southampton

<sup>7</sup> Pamela Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000–1485* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 206–07. See also E. M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England's Export Trade, 1275–1547* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 47–55.

<sup>8</sup> Barron, *London*, p. 98. Nightingale records that London had between two-thirds and three-quarters of the alien trade in England by 1371–72 (*Mercantile Community*, p. 207). The Hansards evidently dropped out of the English wool trade when the staple moved to Calais since, as T. H. Lloyd argues, 'they could expect nothing but second-class treatment' (*The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 216).

for the Genoese to ship wool from England.<sup>9</sup> Imperiale's assurance of greater revenue from import taxes for the King was an offer Richard's government, perennially short of cash, found too good to resist. He was given two years' safe conduct; he also found himself in the middle of simmering three-decades-old conflict between the King, his Italian allies, and the City. In August 1379, he was murdered in the streets by a mercer, John Kirkby, and his accomplice, John Algor, Preston's servant. They were twice acquitted of the murder before a London jury until the King had them tried a third time in Northampton where Algor confessed and Kirkby was hanged.

Paul Strohm has provided a thorough reading of this case as it worked its way through both the royal and legal courts, fixing on how the death of Imperiale implicated more than just the two men ultimately charged with the crime and how it points to a larger community involved in the killing because Imperiale's proposal threatened the City's vital wool trade. He argues:

Principal responsibility for the murder must indeed rest with an inner circle of wool merchants. But civic support for the crime seems to have extended well beyond the members of this small circle. After all, the record shows that no fewer than thirty-seven different citizens of London, proven and sworn for jury duty, stood firmly behind the claim that Kirkby and Algor acted on their own, without malice aforethought, and in self-defense — even in the face of persistent questioning, first by their own sheriffs and then by justices of the highest court in the land.<sup>10</sup>

His reading of this case demonstrates that London was capable of unified action against threats from an outsider, even if this action involved a creative use of the law.

But Strohm's analysis answers only part of why this murder took place. The City did unify behind Imperiale's murderers; however, the City had been unifying

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Z. Kedar argues that, in addition to the Black Death, the collapse of the Mongol states in central Asia forcing European traders to rely on Muslim middle-men to be able to conduct trade with East Asia contributed to a crisis in the middle of the century for Italian merchants. Italian merchants of the period had to contend with this crisis and the ongoing competition and hostility that came with trading as strangers wherever they went to buy or sell, making their lives much more fraught with peril. He provides the example of Janus Imperiale in London as a case in point of how 'in a reasonably well-disposed Christian country and equipped with a personal safe-conduct, a merchant could easily meet with disaster' (*Merchants in Crisis: Genoese and Venetian Men of Affairs and the Fourteenth-Century Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 31).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Strohm, 'Trade, Treason, and the Murder of Janus Imperial', *Journal of British Studies*, 35 (1996), 15–16. Strohm suggests further that 'the larger elements of the community' must also be guilty of this crime as it appears many individuals were involved in delaying justice for Imperiale's assassins (p. 18).

against Italians for years. He was just one of many Italians who made an agreement with the King that circumvented London's own laws and undercut the prices set by the local traders, earning the collective wrath of the citizenry.<sup>11</sup> Nor was his the first murder of a wealthy alien merchant at the hands of the London community. Moreover, in the years before these two murders, other Italian merchants had been beaten or harassed by Londoners out of jealousy over their success or rage over their frauds. Read against the Sardouche case and others, the behaviour of the Londoners in the Imperiale case is part of a pattern rather than an isolated incident.

Italian merchants began arriving in London in the 1120s, but they do not really appear to be a significant trading force in the City until later in the thirteenth century, by which time they had wrested the wool exporting trade from the domination of the Flemish merchants.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the Hanseatic merchants, the Italians did not have any corporate unity on which to rely for protection against English traders. T. H. Lloyd suggests that they instead formed trade societies and companies: 'Drawing strength from their own size, the societies may have eschewed close co-operation even with their fellow citizens lest this lead to the disclosure of secrets.'<sup>13</sup> These societies would rise or fall individually, and for practical purposes were not required to account for any one of their countrymen's misdeeds or insolvency. In exchange for buying English wool, Italian merchants sold a variety of luxuries, such as silks and spices, for which the royal court at Westminster and wealthy Londoners provided a ready market.<sup>14</sup>

Edward III helped set the mid-century mood of the Londoners against the alien traders by a measure that sought to restore the status quo in wages and prices after the Black Death. In 1351, Parliament granted free trade in London, thereby removing the City's franchise and breaking the monopoly the City's guilds

<sup>11</sup> Imperiale had already earned the wrath of London's grocers by underselling pepper, their principal commodity (Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 259).

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd suggests elsewhere that the Italians were able to supplant the Flemings because they could provide 'the large sums necessary to win binding contracts with the leading wool growers' (*Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's, 1982), pp. 199–200).

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd, *Alien Merchants*, p. 167. He adds that 'the only co-operative activities [of Italians] in England of which we have record were forced upon them by the actions of the crown: the making of a consortium to provide a loan or to manage repayments; the provision of mainpernors for fellow Italians awaiting trial; the giving of an adjudication when English lawyers could not comprehend the language and technique of Italian business records' (p. 167).

<sup>14</sup> Barron, *London*, p. 89.

had on buying and selling within London's walls. Alien merchants were now able to trade freely in a city which up to that time had curtailed their commercial activity in favour of its citizens. The guilds began a campaign at once to restore these privileges. Despite complaints, Edward continued to protect Italian traders. For instance, he issued a writ to the mayor and sheriff in 1352–53 to allow the servants of a Genoese merchant, Francisco de Spynola, to sell red, white, and sweet wines in different cellars, though in the same tavern, an allowance which went against the City's custom.<sup>15</sup>

All English traders were compelled to pay taxes to support the King's war with France, but Edward III often exempted Italians from paying these taxes. The City still forced Italians to pay nonetheless. A Florentine merchant, Octavian Fraunceys, complained to the King in 1355 that he 'had been unlawfully compelled to make contribution towards defraying the expenses of the archers who were about to set sail, and [he] had been assaulted by the collectors who had ignored the King's writ on his behalf'.<sup>16</sup> The return to this writ argued that, since Fraunceys lodged in Langebourne Ward, he should contribute to the war as other citizens were required to do; so the City seized his chattels to a value of 5s. Evidently, the problem was not permanently solved because about six months later, Fraunceys made the same complaint to the King.<sup>17</sup>

The London traders who appear more frequently in cases against Italians were the mercers. As dealers in luxury cloth, they would have been the closest commercial rivals to the Italians. When the 1351 revocation of the City's franchise allowed Italian merchants the opportunity to trade in London without the need for London's own mercers to act as middlemen, they were among the first to call for the return of the franchise.<sup>18</sup> The City sent a petition to the King on 23 April 1357 requesting redress for many grievances, the final one being that, due to the loss of the City's franchise, alien merchants 'were more free' than London's citi-

<sup>15</sup> *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, Letter-Book G, c. A.D. 1352–1374*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1905), p. 5. A few years later in 1355, Spynola was pressed by London creditors 'to the prejudice of the King himself, to whom he was indebted in a large sum of money'. The King issued a writ for the mayor and aldermen to stay the creditors until he was first paid, again interfering with the City's rights and customs (pp. 41–42). In 1368, Edward III issued a similar letter of protection for the Society of the Bardi, a society he may have helped to bring to bankruptcy in 1345, to repay its debts to him before anyone else (*Letter-Book G*, pp. 231–32).

<sup>16</sup> *Letter-Book G*, pp. 46–47.

<sup>17</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 212.

zens.<sup>19</sup> No record survives of the King's response. He may have done nothing, prompting some mercers to take matters into their own hands.

A few months later, some mercers attacked two Lombard traders (subsequently identified as Francisco Bochel and Reymund Flamy); the City evidently did nothing about it.<sup>20</sup> When Bochel and Flamy complained to the King, Edward issued a summons for all Lombards to come to Westminster on 3 August 'for the purpose of affording information on certain matters'; these matters may very well have been related to the attack since a proclamation issued the next day extended his protection to all merchants coming to England 'from Lombardy, Alemaine [Germany], and Genoa'.<sup>21</sup> One mercer, Thomas de Maldone, confessed to the assault and named the servant of another as the leader; in all, six mercers were imprisoned in the Tower for their offence. The mayor and aldermen obtained the release of these men later on mainprise.

If the Lombards believed that transferring the authority for this case to the City would ensure adequate recompense or at least a cessation of violence against them, they were mistaken. A year and half later, the Lombards made another appeal to the King that accused seven mercers of inflicting harm on them; the King summoned the entire company to appear before the council, where it received a warning not to harm the Lombards.<sup>22</sup> Those mercers who had been mainprised were imprisoned and an inquest held in the City, the details of which appear in

<sup>19</sup> *Letter-Book G*, pp. 85–86. Tensions over this issue were still high over a decade later when Nicholas Mollere, a blacksmith's servant, was put in the pillory in June 1371 for saying that merchant strangers were trading as freely as citizens (*Letter-Book G*, p. 283).

<sup>20</sup> Alice Beardwood has described in detail the events surrounding what was quite obviously an attack based on trade frustrations which she adds may have been 'aggravated by such practices as led to the prosecution of the merchants of Lucca and of Nicholas Sardouche, in particular, a few years later' (*Alien Merchants in England, 1350 to 1377: Their Legal and Economic Position* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1931), p. 93). Henry Thomas Riley suggests that the date of the attack, the Monday after the Feast of St John the Baptist, referred to the Decollation of St John the Baptist celebrated on 29 August (*Memorials of London and London Life in the XIIIth, XIVth, and XVth Centuries*, ed. by Riley (London: Longmans, Green, 1868), p. 302 n. 2). But Beardwood disagrees on the grounds that this date 'would leave less than two months for the investigation by the council, the imprisonment and release of the mercers and the writ for the release of Thomas de Maldon says he has been imprisoned a long time' (*Alien Merchants*, p. 96 n. 3). She proposes instead that the feast was on 24 June, making the attack occur on 28 June. This date would make a better case for suggesting that the two proclamations Edward III issues concerning Lombards on 3 and 4 August 1357 are in response to the attacks.

<sup>21</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> *Select Cases before the King's Council, 1243–1482*, ed. by I. S. Leadam and J. F. Baldwin, *Selden Society*, 35 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), pp. 42–47.

the *Letter-Book G*.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, many of the mercers were released after receiving hefty fines; a servant who was implicated fled and was declared an outlaw.<sup>24</sup> The case was not closed until 1362. Its slow pace was not unusual for English justice, nor did its resolution salve tensions in the City.

By the 1370s, the anti-alien movement among the grocers and mercers had elected several of their numbers to key positions in London's government and had made two petitions to Parliament in behalf of London's trade.<sup>25</sup> The King very likely ignored these petitions, but he did not ignore violence against Lombards trading in the City since they were under his protection. In May of 1371, the King summoned the mayor, sheriffs, recorder, aldermen, and four 'of the more sufficient commoners of each mystery in the City' to Guildford in Surrey.<sup>26</sup> Mayor John de Bernes, a mercer, requested that a smaller number of people should appear because 'the civic authorities feared for the government of the City and the preservation of the peace' should the full number of those summoned depart the City.<sup>27</sup> The King refused this request and, when the summoned individuals presented themselves, he imprisoned in the Tower twelve Londoners perceived to have fomented anti-alien disturbances.<sup>28</sup> Unrest, though, still simmered, and Italians continued to feel threatened despite the King's protection.

The King apparently drew the line on his protection when Sardouche's career of fraud and deception was exposed in the late 1360s. *Silkwymmen* accused Sardouche on 25 November 1368 of cornering the market on silk in the City and raising its price to the detriment of their trade. When he appeared before the mayor, he admitted that he had bought his silk from other alien merchants and had weighed it on his own beam, thereby breaking an important London ordinance:

[A]ll silk and merchandise of the same character exposed for sale in the City ought to be weighed at the common balance of the City established for that purpose under penalty of forfeiture of such merchandise weighed otherwise, and [...] the said Nicholas had

<sup>23</sup> *Letter-Book G*, 112; see also, *Memorials*, pp. 302–03.

<sup>24</sup> Beardwood, *Alien Merchants*, pp. 92–98. For the Latin text of the proceedings for this case, see Beardwood, *ibid.*, pp. 189–96.

<sup>25</sup> *Rotuli Parliamentorum: Ut et petitiones et placita in Parlamento 1278–1503*, 6 vols (London: 1767–77), II, 306–07.

<sup>26</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 280.

<sup>27</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 281.

<sup>28</sup> Nightingale speculates that these men were eventually 'dispersed to various royal castles throughout the realm, probably so that they should not serve as a rallying point for more disorders' (*Mercantile Community*, p. 235).

confessed that he had bought the aforesaid silk from [...] alien merchants, for further sale or transference for sale to foreign parts, and had weighed it with his own balance against the aforesaid ordinance.<sup>29</sup>

But breaking this ordinance was evidently only the tip of the iceberg. The *silk-wymmen* sent a petition to the King asking him to look into this accusation and other ‘subtle operations’. Over the next few weeks, three inquests followed which revealed a host of illegal activities including sending abroad about £1000 in gold and silver plate, misrepresenting imported goods amounting to a further £1000 by alleging them to belong to a Londoner, Thomas Serlandi, thereby evading the custom duties on them, forestalling goods to increase their price to the value of £4000, persuading such merchants to sell their wares at higher prices to the cost of £1000 in damages to the nation, making £2000 by weighing silk on his beam, importing luxuries concealed in common goods to evade more custom duties to a value of £6000, and exporting about £1000 in bullion.<sup>30</sup> These charges were egregious, but what followed showed the division between the King and the City over how Sardouche should be punished.

On 3 January 1369, the King requested all information regarding the Sardouche investigation. When the City did not provide it for him, Edward demanded that the mayor and the sheriffs appear at Westminster to ‘explain their contempt of the King’s commands’.<sup>31</sup> The mayor’s court responded that the requested materials had already been sent, and it embarked on its next inquest. The King sent two further demands and in the second, dated 21 January, wanted Sardouche himself. The *Letter-Book G* records a third request issued six days later to which the mayor responded:

[A]ccording to the custom of the City, no indictments, presentations, records, or process before the Mayor, Sheriffs, and Aldermen, not relating to felony, ought to be returned outside the City, but the same ought to be determined before the said Mayor, &c., within the City, and therefore the above writ cannot be executed without infringing the liberty of the City.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Calendar of Plea and Memoranda Rolls Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London at the Guildhall, A. D. 1364–1381*, ed. by A. H. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 100–01. Sardouche had already been accused of passing a fraudulent bill of exchange to a Pistoian named Vane Camby in 1364 (*Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 10).

<sup>30</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, pp. 102–06.

<sup>31</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 237.

Regardless of the City's hesitancy, Sardouche and his case eventually made it to the King, who fined him £200 in June and ordered all Sardouche's property seized by the Londoners restored to him.<sup>33</sup> Within a week, Sardouche presented to the mayor and aldermen a writ of protection from the King against any violence done to him or loss or damage to his property.<sup>34</sup> How the City responded to this development is unrecorded.

Just over a year after Sardouche received his fine, a group of mercers complained in July 1370 that Sardouche had withheld their share of the goods they transported from Flanders into his care.<sup>35</sup> Then, in December 1370, Sardouche was found murdered in London. Though an inquest was held, his murderers, probably all mercers, were never prosecuted. In fact, the King felt compelled to pardon them all, despite Sardouche's royal protection. Perhaps the King's patience had finally worn out.

Pamela Nightingale comments that many Londoners no doubt rejoiced at Sardouche's death; she speculates that 'popular support for the perpetrators' must have led to the pardon of the murderers.<sup>36</sup> The character, business practices, and nationality of the victim had garnered so much resentment among the Londoners that the King probably thought a pardon a wiser course than prosecution. The conspirators may then have felt justified that, though their decision went against the rule of law, Sardouche deserved what he got, and the City closed ranks behind them.

The Imperiale murder unfolded in a manner similar to Sardouche's. Here was another man threatening the City's trade and who had made an agreement with the King to circumvent London's laws. Sympathy with the murderers seems to have appeared from the outset of the investigation. When the murder was first discovered, a month passed before the inquest accused anyone of the crime. As was the City's custom, jurors were given the charge of discovering whether a murder had taken place, 'what became of the felon, what goods and chattels he may have had, who first discovered the body, and who witnessed the felony'.<sup>37</sup> No Italians sat on this jury. Had this crime against Imperiale been merely a case of trespass or debt, half of the members of the jury could be composed of Italians or

<sup>33</sup> *Letter-Book G*, pp. 247–48.

<sup>34</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 109.

<sup>35</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 118.

<sup>36</sup> Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 233; see also Beardwood, *Alien Merchants*, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Calendar of Coroners' Rolls of the City of London, A.D. 1300–1378*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: Clay, 1913; repr. San Bernardino, CA: Borgo, 1995), p. xiv.

other aliens, according to City custom.<sup>38</sup> But because it was a homicide, the jury was composed entirely of London citizens.<sup>39</sup> Medieval justice could move slowly; however, this case seems to have gone very slowly, indicating that more than just the two accused murderers had an interest in delaying the case or having it never reach trial. In fact, a presenting jury had to be summoned three times before any suspects could be found. Only their third appearance brought indictments against Algor and Kirkby.

When this jury reported their findings, they claimed that Imperiale had been sitting with some servants in front of his lodging when 'John Kirkby suddenly and by no wish of his own then trod unwittingly on Janus Imperial's feet, whereupon the said Janus Imperial was annoyed and clearly began to lose his temper'.<sup>40</sup> The jurors' report also asserted that Kirkby struck Imperiale several times with a sword and that Algor assaulted a few of Imperiale's servants. The verdict was that Kirkby killed Imperiale 'for the aforesaid reason and not out of any malice aforethought or previous quarrelling between them'.<sup>41</sup> In light of this ruling, the jury appeared to accept Kirkby's explanation that Imperiale's death was an accident and advised no punishment beyond sending him and Algor to Newgate.

During the month that elapsed between the murder and the accusation, Kirkby and Algor evidently remained in London. Strohm comments that the two culprits remaining in the City must have 'enjoyed the protection of powerful allies. The evasive behaviour of the juries would also suggest that this was so'.<sup>42</sup> While Kirkby and Algor certainly may have had powerful allies, they had one other more important reason to remain in the City. Because of London's climate of anti-Italian feeling, they must have felt that they were more guaranteed of acquittal if they were tried by a London jury than by one in the provinces or by the

<sup>38</sup> *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis: Liber Albus, Liber Custumarum, Liber Horn*, ed. by Henry Thomas Riley, 3 vols (London: Rolls Series, 1859–62), I, 292.

<sup>39</sup> Crimes judged to be felonies were 'homicide, rape, robbery, larceny, arson, and breach of prison while under arrest for felony'. Anthony Musson and W. M. Ormrod, *The Evolution of English Justice: Law, Politics and Society in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: St Martin's, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Select Cases in the Court of King's Bench under Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V*, ed. by G. O. Sayles, Selden Society, 88 (London: Quaritch, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Sayles, *King's Bench*, p. 17. George Unwin states his conviction that the alderman ordered Imperiale's death as the result of several years of xenophobic reactions to foreigner traders by powerful guildsmen. See Unwin, *The Gilds and Companies of London* (London: Cass, 1908; repr. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), pp. 79 and 141.

<sup>42</sup> Strohm, 'Trade', p. 5.

King, basing this hope on the Sardouche case nine years earlier. They were correct in this assumption, as future events bore out.

The London juries behaved as Kirkby and Algor must have anticipated. But Algor and Kirkby made two errors in their calculations. As Strohm indicates, the felony trial put them under the jurisdiction of the King's Bench and out of London's own court.<sup>43</sup> Also, Richard was not going to ignore the royal protection he had given Imperiale, as Edward did for Sardouche. The King charged the murderers with treason and ordered a new trial to be held in Westminster in March 1380; he also denied permission for Algor and Kirkby to plead the clergy.<sup>44</sup> This new jury, though still impanelled within the London area, judged Imperiale's death self-defence and also acquitted the defendants of treason. Though, when the jurors were asked how Imperiale's death could have been in self-defence, they admitted that they did not know.<sup>45</sup>

The King refused to accept this judgement as well. He held a third trial in November in Northampton during parliament where a guilty verdict was reached and in December Kirkby was hanged.<sup>46</sup> That same day, apparently, Algor confessed in the presence of the Duke of Lancaster and other lords that he and Kirkby had purposely sought out Imperiale to goad him into a fight. In doing so, Kirkby deliberately tripped over Imperiale's feet not once, but three times before receiving any reaction from Imperiale. Algor further confessed that the reason they decided on this assault was that Algor had heard from some of the members of the Grocers' Guild that Imperiale 'would destroy and ruin all the wool merchants in London and elsewhere within the realm of England' if his Southampton proposal was accepted.<sup>47</sup>

Changing the trial's venue deprived the defendants of support from London. At this point, Algor must have believed that it had become every man for himself. He implicitly involved some of London's chief citizens as accessories in his confession, and perhaps these men or their reputations may have intimidated the jurors. Or, the reputations of these men together with the general anti-Italian feeling in London may have convinced the jurors to side with their own citizens against a suspicious alien. In any case, London juries twice acquitted both men without providing wholly convincing reasons for their decision.

<sup>43</sup> Strohm, 'Trade', p. 3 and n. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, 75; Sayles, *King's Bench*, pp. 18–20.

<sup>45</sup> Sayles, *King's Bench*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> Sayles, *King's Bench*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> Sayles, *King's Bench*, p. 41.

Significantly, a confession and a conviction came only after moving away from the presence of a London deputation to a region where anti-Italian feeling did not exist or was not a significant force. Certainly, one could argue that the King was more interested in vengeance than in justice and wanted to find a reason to hang Kirkby for a murder he could not satisfactorily assign to him based on the evidence presented. Forbidding Kirkby the right to plead the clergy also shows his determination to have someone's neck to fill a noose by denying an otherwise acceptable legal defence. But the nature of Kirkby's attack on Imperiale and the connections he and Algor had with the powerful men of the City are elements too suspicious to dismiss as coincidences. Imperiale, as with many Italians before him, had threatened London, and it responded.

After Kirkby's execution, the King had requested the mayor to put down some disturbances in the City; the mayor replied that these disturbances had not been as great as the King believed and had been put down according to the City's custom.<sup>48</sup> Nightingale believes that these disturbances were a response to Kirkby's trial.<sup>49</sup> If such were the case, Kirkby's death had done nothing to reduce the anti-Italian tensions which were just as high in the closing month of 1380 as they had been in the previous thirty years. Algor was released from prison four years later, in 1384, by the King as a favour to the Grocers' Guild. The Genoese increased their use of Southampton as their port in the 1380s and eventually became very serious rivals to the Londoners for the wool trade.<sup>50</sup> Imperiale's death made no difference except to help raise tensions between the City and the King, which would be City's focus for the next two decades.

### *Lombards in Gower's Poetry*

Into this volatile climate, Gower's criticisms of the Lombards, especially in the *Mirour*, fit perfectly. R. F. Yeager believes that Gower may have written the poem because he believed a French-speaking audience for it in the English court, including Edward III himself, existed at this time. Gower also composed this ambitious poem over many years, ending it probably around 1378 when addressing a French 'mirror for princes' to the English sovereign no longer seemed

<sup>48</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 275.

<sup>49</sup> Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 260.

<sup>50</sup> Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 324.

useful.<sup>51</sup> My argument may not alter any attempts to date the poem except to the broad period of anti-Italian sentiment from about 1350 to 1380, after which time other issues engaged the attention of Londoners, namely the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and the conflict between the mayors, John of Northampton and Nicholas Brembre, and their partisans. While Gower does condemn Lombards in the *Confessio*, he provides none of the specifics that he does in the *Mirour*. Consequently, the French poem's anti-Italian passages were probably composed very close to the period of white-hot animosity in the City during the 1350s and 1360s and, as such, respond to a specific historical moment, while the nonspecific hostility in the *Confessio* more probably reflects hard feelings that had not improved over time.

Gower's proximity to London during the entire compositional process would naturally afford him the opportunity to observe firsthand how his fellow Londoners treated and were treated by the Lombard traders drawn there for the ready markets. His observations reflect a bias in favour of native English commerce and against Lombards in general. They also recognize the imperative to maintain fair trade for the sake of national prosperity and social order. Writing this poem in French would ensure that it would be addressed to a courtly audience which would have had the power to effect a positive change. It would also make clear to readers in the royal government how detrimental to the realm its policies had been. As such, Gower makes one of the earliest arguments in England for local and national commercial policies to be in harmony with each other.

As stated earlier, the passage against the Italians must be read in context with the praise of wool which precedes it. In the wool passage, Gower transforms wool ironically into a female object of desire wooed by many people who are motivated by a love of her which 'pierces and binds the hearts of those who trade' in her (p. 333) (tant point et lie, [...] Les cuers qui font la marchandie; 25406–08). He mildly pokes fun at merchants who come to seek wool 'in great love' (Par grant amour; 25385) as if it were a great romance beauty. So desirable is the wool that

<sup>51</sup> R. F. Yeager has recently argued that the compositional process of the *Mirour* follows the fortunes of Edward III's campaigns in France during the Hundred Years' War, beginning perhaps between 1356 and 1360 and concluding around 1378 after Edward was dead and his design of uniting the crowns and tongues of England and France under one French-speaking English king unfulfilled. Yeager, 'Politics and the French Language in England during the Hundred Years' War: The Case of John Gower', in *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures*, ed. by Denise N. Baker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 127–57. See also, Yeager, 'John Gower's French', in *A Companion to Gower* (see n. 6, above), pp. 142–45.

everyone cherishes it ('par tout le mond cheris'; 25390), including Christians, pagans, and Saracens ('ensi comme le cristin, | Einsi paien et Sarazin'; 25378–79). This romantic language playfully characterizing the merchant's desire for profit as a single-minded quest provides a means of explaining the attraction of a particular and very important commodity. Seeking wool because they love it does not make merchants seem tainted by greed as would the truth that they seek it because they can make money from it.

Praising wool in the mid-fourteenth century is a political statement. Gower's utterance allies himself with the powers of the civil government of London and against royal policy which, according to Gower, seeks false love in the form of enriching the royal coffers at the expense of the rest of the economy.<sup>52</sup> Edward III and later Richard II regarded the wool trade as a diplomatic tool, only one of many at their disposal, while Londoners regarded wool as the basis of their livelihood. For them wool is a desired object, even an object of love, because its absence would mean more than sorrow; it would mean destruction. Prosperity and therefore happiness rests on a healthy and fair trading system.

Earlier in the *Mirour*, Gower argues that trade was a part of God's plan to have all nations work together with one country supplying what another needed. Trade also works to ensure moral goodness because 'if a single nation had all the goods together, then it would be too proud' (Si une terre avoir porroit | Tous biens ensemble, lors serroit | Trop orguillouse; 25189–91). Consequently, the merchant is necessary to the nation, performing a patriotic role in his buying, selling, and transportation of needed commodities. Gower concludes that 'whoever behaves well and trades honestly is blessed by both God and man' (Pour ce qui bien se gardera, | Et loyalment marchandera, | De dieu et homme il est benoit; 25198–5200). He makes this point to justify the merchant earning a profit on the goods he sells and also to underscore the civic role that the honest merchant and

<sup>52</sup> Gower attests to wool's status as an English product by stating 'You are born in England' (En Engleterre tu es née; 25396). John Hurt Fisher speculates that, because Gower did appear before the Staple court, it 'is evidence that he had investment in the wool trade' (*John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), pp. 54–55). We may never know what Gower's investments in the trade were or how extensively he may have been involved in it. In any case, he would have naturally regarded Lombard traders as natural competitors. Macaulay writes that 'no definite evidence that Gower was a merchant' exists. Gower's interest in the wool trade 'may well have arisen from his residence in or near the city and his personal acquaintance with merchants' (IV, p. xxvii). What is important here is his sympathy with the merchants of the City and the ruling powers' ability to keep the City in order. Gower is one of the earliest observers to the reality that the health of the kingdom is directly related to the health of its trade.

trader must play for the nation. Practising fraud betrays the nation, because it puts the individual's need above the corporate need of the community.

Against his account of ideal commerce, Gower places the Italians, accusing them of being uniformly interested in their own good and profit rather than in practising fair trade: 'In Florence and in Venice Fraud has his fortress and his license' (p. 331) (*Triche a Florence et a Venise | Ad son recet et sa franchise; 25249–50*).<sup>53</sup> Moreover, as aliens, they 'claim to dwell in our country just as free and welcome as if they were born and brought up with us' (pp. 333–34).<sup>54</sup> Many of Gower's contemporary Londoners made similar complaints throughout the 1360s when Italian merchants began setting up their own shops in London against the rules of City.<sup>55</sup> London's government had ruled in 1311–12 that aliens could become citizens of London with full enfranchisement only by the consent of the commonalty.<sup>56</sup> Many aliens were able to get around this rule by receiving a grant of denization from the King. But as Alice Beardwood points out, 'The king, nobles or influential men might recommend persons for citizenship but it lay wholly within the power of the city authorities to confer it or not.'<sup>57</sup> One result of the loss of the City's franchise in 1351 was that many Italians were more easily able to settle in London.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Gower does not locate Fraud solely in Italy. In the next line, he ascribes Fraud's franchise as well to Bruges and Ghent, two Flemish towns important in the cloth trade (25251). The choice of the word *franchise* in the original text is important here since it is the term that governs admission to citizenship in the city. Read in this circumstance, Fraud has its citizenship among the Italians; it also has its ability to trade from these cities.

<sup>54</sup> 'En nostre terre a mon avis | Des Lumbardz, qui sont estranger, | Q'est ce q'ils vuillont chalanger | A demourer en noz païs | Tout auci francs, auci cheris, | Comme s'ils fuissent neez et norriz | Ovesque nous' (25431–37). In a later passage, Gower complains that 'foreigners are more free than the denizens' in the City (*les foreins | Serront plus franc que cils dedeins; 26377–78*).

<sup>55</sup> Nightingale provides the example of the Fraternity of St Antonin, an organization mostly comprised of spicers and pepperers, as one that specifically excluded a handful of Italians who traded in spices, reflecting the desire of native London traders to protect their trade against alien competitors: 'What had brought some of the spicers of Cheap and the more important ropers to join the Fraternity of St Antonin was not the desire to monopolise, or "engross", the goods of other trades, but the need firstly, to protect their own trade against provincial, unfree, and Italian competition after 1351' (*Mercantile Community*, pp. 204–06).

<sup>56</sup> *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, Letter-Book D, c. A.D. 1309–1314*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1902), p. 283.

<sup>57</sup> Beardwood, *Alien Merchants*, p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> Nightingale, *Mercantile Community*, p. 223.

Italian traders often resorted to the use of brokers to buy and sell in the City even after the franchise was revoked. Sylvia Thrupp writes that their ‘suspect profession of brokerage’ was one of the key reasons for anti-Italian prejudice in London.<sup>59</sup> Gower reflects this prejudice, arguing that the Lombards ‘know so well how to play the hazard of brokers and procurement’ ([...] ils scievont [...] | Si bien juer la jeupartie | Du brocage et procurement; 25453–55) so that they could easily get the nobility on their side. Because brokers did not belong to a guild, no recognized City body regulated them or even knew their numbers. The popular worry was that these alien merchants were usurers, a practice universally condemned by the City. A 1345 ordinance, though, did empower London brokers to investigate non-native London brokers.<sup>60</sup> This ordinance came about as a reaction against outside competition with the wool and drapery trade.

In 1366, the grocers, which were particularly rigorous in punishing alien brokers, brought action against thirteen aliens, among them were a few Italians, including one Zenabi de Martino Chillato, or Zenobius Martyn.<sup>61</sup> This particular Italian seems not to have learned his lesson because seven years later he confessed to being a broker against the City’s ordinance.<sup>62</sup> In 1367, the grocers summoned another Italian, Nicholas Negrebon, to answer for the charge of brokering.<sup>63</sup> A year later, the grocers presented their own brokers to the mayor and aldermen.<sup>64</sup> Then in 1373, the City allowed alien brokers to operate once they paid a fee of ‘at least 40s’ and found ‘two or three sufficient sureties’; the record of this proclamation is followed by a list of brokers and their pledges.<sup>65</sup> The City guilds choosing

<sup>59</sup> Thrupp, *Merchant Class*, p. 221.

<sup>60</sup> *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, Letter-Book F, c. A.D. 1337–1352*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1904), p. 129. Beardwood believes that London was inconsistent in allowing aliens to be brokers (*Alien Merchants*, p. 57).

<sup>61</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 58. Nightingale argues that by ‘controlling the brokers and by using political pressure on the City’s government they hoped to fend off Italian competition’ (*Mercantile Community*, p. 225).

<sup>62</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 151. In this same confession, he also admitted his guilt in keeping a lodging house for aliens, not being a citizen of the City, and acting as ‘a common bawd’. He was imprisoned again in 1375 (p. 191).

<sup>63</sup> *Plea and Memoranda Rolls*, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup> *Letter-Book G*, p. 235.

<sup>65</sup> *Letter-Book G*, pp. 313–14. This *Letter-Book* lists a number of Lombard merchants and the 40s. they paid as well as those London merchants who agreed to stand surety for them, including Thomas Serlandi, who was linked to Sardouche. Later in early 1376, another proclamation

their own brokers and arguing that alien brokers should either be regulated or forced out indicates how, over the course of the middle decades of the century, the many trading groups in London sought to create a unified commercial system to counter unscrupulous aliens or an interfering king.

Gower especially argues that this interfering king and his nobles are working against the English people. Sardouche and Imperiale are the most significant examples of Italians who had bought royal licences to trade without regard to London's trade laws. Gower argues that greed is what motivates England's overlords to privilege the alien money over the needs of the English economy: 'one should cry shame on such gentlemen, who by bribery and gifts (large and small) create credit and trust for such people, who are conspiring to hurt us in order to profit themselves' (p. 334).<sup>66</sup> The behaviour of the King and his court in granting these licences goes against the national good, especially as it harms 'us', and puts native merchants into bondage ('mettre en servage'; 25486).

One result of this bondage is that the native traders are encumbered with debts they cannot repay because they cannot sell their goods. The other result is that the government creates a trade imbalance because the English need to export gold and silver bullion in exchange for the Italian goods coming into the realm. Such a trade imbalance did occur in the late 1360s when Edward III sold so many licences to evade the Calais staple that a drain of bullion from the kingdom resulted in a rise in prices.<sup>67</sup> Gower may be responding to this situation when he complains that the Lombards were depriving the English of gold and silver (25444–47). His accusation was not ill-founded, considering that Sardouche, for instance, had shipped bullion from the kingdom.

By his actions, the King is punishing his own people with debt and draining the kingdom of money, while at the same time allowing laws to be broken and legally granted rights circumvented. It is not the way to run a prosperous state

decreed against brokering unless the broker 'has been received by the Mayor and his companions in a manner ordained, and unless he be elected by four good men of the mistery wherein he is to act as broker' (*Calendar of the Letter-Books Preserved among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, Letter-Book H, c. A.D. 1375–1399*, ed. by Reginald R. Sharpe (London: John Edward Francis, 1907), pp. 21–22).

<sup>66</sup> ' [...] l'en doit bien dire avoi | As tiels seigneours qui par brocage | Des douns avoir, ou grant ou poy, | Vuillont donner credence ou foy | As tieles gens, qui no damage | Aguaitont pour lour avantage' (25478–83).

<sup>67</sup> Barron demonstrates that anti-Italian hostility in the middle of the fifteenth century had its origins in a similar bullion shortage which was fomented by the wrong belief 'that the Italians took away goods of less value than those they imported' (*London*, p. 113).

and, Gower asserts, ‘What I see does not make sense’ (N’est pas resoun ce que je voi; 25477). The *covoitise* of both the Lombards and the royal government have come together to threaten the stability and common profit of England at the expense of its people. The accusation of *covoitise* moves the poem out of politics and back to morality, but the topicality of this passage is unmistakable. In his later poetry, Gower will not make such specific charges against the Lombards as he has done here in the *Mirour*. The moment had passed, but Gower’s hostility toward the Lombards had not abated.

The *Confessio*, completed fifteen or more years after the *Mirour*, contains similar comments against Lombards, which fall into two categories: complaints about their fraudulent trading in London and about the tyrannies that comprise their Italian homeland. In the case of the Italian tyrannies, Gower argues that the covetousness and envy in their own lands cause division among them and lost them the rulership of the empire to the Germans under Otto (*Confessio*, Prol.781–801). The region of Lombardy, he suggests, is where lechery is most common (vII.799–800). He made similar remarks about the morality of the Lombards in the *Mirour*, alleging that their lords live according to their own will rather than by following the law (‘Qui vivont tout au volenté | Sanz loy tenir d’oneste vie’; 23235–36).<sup>68</sup> In the *Confessio*, he tells the ‘Tale of Albinus and Rosamund’ as an example of pride and also as an illustration of the Lombards’ penchant for causing division. This description of Lombardy does not appear in the *Mirour* except in the idea that the Lombards all demonstrate the same divisive activity in trade rather than in politics.

But the category of his complaints in the *Confessio* about Lombards in London is the more relevant of the two for our purposes because these complaints follow the pattern set in the *Mirour*. Different from what he does in the *Mirour* though, Gower does not provide any specific examples of these frauds. He merely states that the Lombards make a profit when they should not by showing something ‘withoute | Which is revers to that withinne’ (*Confessio*, II.2104–05). Russell Peck equates this local concern with the ethical concern of false seeming that occurs throughout the fiction of the *Confessio*. In his analysis, the Lombards (particularly the bankers ‘to whom the English throne is much indebted’) are adept at making something into another thing entirely.<sup>69</sup> Genius tells Amans that Falssemblant, ‘false-seeming’, dwells ‘among ous here, | Of suche as we Lombardes

<sup>68</sup> He accuses them also of a variety of sins, namely pride, lechery, covetousness, and avarice, all of which they export everywhere (*Mirour*, 23233–51).

<sup>69</sup> Russell A. Peck, ‘The Phenomenology of Make Believe in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*’, *Studies in Philology*, 91 (1994), 259–60.

calle' (2100–01). The trade of *Falssemblant* is *Fa crere* ('make believe') and is the definition of fraud. Peck comments that Genius's use of the Lombards here is illustrative to help Amans recognize the falseness of his perceptions.

Referring to *ous* in this passage is an acknowledgment of a shared public perception of Lombard behaviour that all English-reading audience members would accept as true, though the *ous* to whom he must refer could only be those who have had direct experience with Italians. To this group, Italian fraud is a given. Nothing really needs to be proven. Consequently, his indictment here is vague and actually begins with a conclusion: the Lombards are 'the slyeste of alle, | So as men sein in toune aboute' (2102–03). And yet, Gower is in reality relying on a misperception as truth. He has fallen into the trap he has been describing to his poetic self, Amans, through his poetic other self, Genius. The historical Lombards were no more prone to fraud than any other trading group in London, but Gower's impressions, drawn from a life's experience in the City and as a patriotic writer, have died hard.

Instead of being based on Peck's convenient local figure, these condemnations form a consistent vision with his earlier French poem. His English poem for 'Engelondes sake' (or, Richard's as well) seeks to praise those elements useful to the realm and condemn those injurious to it. The Lombards fall into the latter category by the late 1380s and 1390s for the same reasons that they found themselves in it three decades before. They practise fraud and never seem to get punished for it:

Of Lombardz unto this covine,  
Whiche alle londes conne engine,  
Mai Falssemblant in special  
Be likned, for thei overal,  
Wher as they thenken forto duelle,  
Among hemself, so as thei telle,  
Ferst ben enformed forto lere  
A craft which cleped is *Fa crere*

(2115–22)

As he wrote in the *Mirour*, the effect of the Lombards is to teach falseness and make believe. In his explanatory note to these lines, Peck comments that they refer to 'Gower's hostility toward Lombard bankers'.<sup>70</sup> But taken in context with what

<sup>70</sup> John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. by Russell A. Peck, with Latin translations by Andrew Galloway, TEAMS, Middle English Texts Series, 3 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000–05), ii, 344. Peck argues elsewhere that this anti-Lombard belief stems from

Gower has written about Lombards before, his hostility encompasses all aspects of Italian commercial enterprise; banking is only one part, buying and selling another. Here, their traffic in false seeming works against the entire idea of fair trade which Gower had elucidated in the *Mirour*.

Since Amans, as a lover, must beware of false seeming in his love, he must also beware of it as an English reader in the presence of unscrupulous traders who pervert the divinely mandated practice of trade for their own enrichment. The innocent victims of the Italians must pay for them:

Thus gon thei fre withoute bond  
To don her profit al at large,  
And othre men bere al the charge.  
(2112-14)

This passage could also allude to the practice of the royal government allowing the Lombards to circumvent London's laws in order to trade as citizens but without paying taxes.

Such a tax that London's government was determined to impose on alien traders was scavage, a toll levied on alien merchants trading within the City. As we have seen, Sardouche was able to get around paying scavage by alleging that all the goods he sold in the City were actually the property of Serlandi, a London citizen who would not need to pay the toll. Mayor William Venour and his alderman had issued an ordinance in January 1389/90 declaring that aliens would pay half the scavage 'to help defray the expenses of the Mayor during his Mayoralty'.<sup>71</sup> On 8 March 1395/96, five Italian merchants came before the mayor and alderman complaining about the scavage toll, alleging that for the past twelve years they had paid it 'on heavy merchandise of little value brought to London in small boats from Southampton [sic] and other ports, whilst goods of lighter and more valuable description, on which they were unwilling to pay the custom, were brought to London over-land'; Mayor William More judged that the merchants should pay the toll on all goods 'coming to London as well by land as by water'.<sup>72</sup> Certainly

Gower's belief that they 'make gain without real labor', illustrating that their trade is at its base 'antithetical to "common profit"' (*Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 70). While Gower does not condemn trade and profit, he does condemn unfair trade which the Italians embody.

<sup>71</sup> *Letter-Book H*, pp. 350-51.

<sup>72</sup> *Letter-Book H*, pp. 429-30. The toll is recorded in the *Liber Albus* where the term is glossed as meaning a 'shewing' because it behoves the merchants that they shew unto the Sheriffs the merchandize for which the custom is to be taken, before that any of it be sold' (III, 58).

the mayors wanted to protect scavage for perhaps selfish reasons, but for Gower, avoiding this and other tolls is behaviour indicative of the greed and fraudulent commercial practices of Italian merchants taking advantage of the system that the royal government had put into place to benefit the King, the Italians, and no one else.

The *Confessio* passages offer nothing fundamentally new to those charges made in the *Mirour* except for the assessment that what Gower has observed is a view shared by others with no sign of these problems being amended. His hostility toward the Lombards is consistent throughout his poetic career. As with many Londoners, Gower believed that Italians received unfairly preferential treatment by the royal government at the expense of native traders. These issues combined with perhaps the real or imagined illegal activities of some Italian traders, such as Nicholas Sardouche, contributed to Gower's vision of this entire nation of merchants being antithetical to the purpose of commerce. His two poetic complaints about them serve as a warning to all readers to beware of a group of men who come from a land of division and who seek to spread this division wherever they go, undermining the moral function of trade and the vital fabric of harmony which keeps all cities, especially London, together in social love and common profit.

## PROMISCUOUS CONTEXTS: GOWER'S WIFE, PROSTITUTION, AND THE *CONFESSIO AMANTIS*

Eve Salisbury

While much is known about Gower and his work, the same cannot be said about Gower's wife, Agnes. Referred to only fleetingly in a marriage 'licence', a legal document, Gower's will, and the inscription on her tomb, Agnes appears to be relegated to a position of *feme couvert*, placed under the aegis of her spouse and virtually subsumed into his identity. Agnes's marriage to the poet in late January of 1397/98 exists in the records of the Bishop of Winchester in whose jurisdiction the nuptials took place;<sup>1</sup> the poet's will lists her as executrix and recipient of several personal items,<sup>2</sup> a legal document written

<sup>1</sup> G. C. Macaulay reads January 1397/98; see *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902), IV, p. xvii. W. H. Gunner reads January 1397; see *Notes & Queries*, ser. 1, 9 (1854), 487–88. John H. Fisher uses the post-eighteenth-century calendar; see *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Works of John Gower*, IV, p. xviii. Macaulay lists Agnes and the four men as executors: 'The executors of this will are to be as follows: Agnes his wife, Arnold Savage, knight, Roger, esquire, William Denne, Canon of the king's chapel, and John Burton, clerk. Dated in the priory of St. Mary Overes in Southwark on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, mcccvi' [1408] (IV, p. xviii). See also Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, who calls Agnes the 'executrix' while the four men serve as witnesses: 'Agnes his wife was executrix, and the witnesses were shades from his past and present existence' (p. 66). Harris Nicholas, 'John Gower, the Poet', *Retrospective Review*, 2 (1828), 103–17, provides the Latin text, relevant passages of which are as follows: 'Item volo quod, si dicta Agnes uxor mea diuicius me vivat, tunc ipsa libere et pacifice, immediate post mortem meam, percipiat omnes redditus michi debitos de firmis Maneriorum meorum tam de Southwell in Comitatu Nott[ingham] quam de Multon in Com. Suff[olk] prout

on 16 February 1410, two years after the poet's death, assigns her a modest rental income from the poet's properties,<sup>3</sup> and the epitaph on her tomb, probably composed by the poet himself before his death, proclaims her to have been an 'uxor amans', 'pious', 'charitable', and 'chaste in will'.<sup>4</sup> According to John Leland's early commentaries, she appears to have been buried in the same place as the poet, though 'more humbly'.<sup>5</sup> As these fragments seem to suggest, Agnes's identity was conceived and shaped primarily by her poet/husband before he died.

Since the discovery and publication of these documents some notable speculation has emerged especially regarding the unusual circumstances surrounding the poet's marriage to this woman called Agnes — that it took place in his personal

in quodam scripto inde confecto sub sigillo meo necnon sub sigillis aliorum plenius constari poterit. Huius autem Testamenti facio et constituo executores meos, viz. Agnetem uxorem meam, dominum Arnaldum Savage militem, dominum Rogerum Armigerum, dominum Willelmum Denne canonicum Capelle domini Regis, et Johannem Burton clericum [...]. Administracioque omnium bonorum dictum testamentum concern, ubicunque [sic?] etc. Dilecte in Christo filie Agneti uxori sue exec [utrix] in eodem Testamento nominate commissa exitit et per candem admissa in debita forma iuris [...] et administracio bornorum eiusdem dicte Agneti commissa de et super administracione, etc. Confidentes ipsam ab ulteriori etc.'

<sup>3</sup> The list of items is cited in *The Complete Works of John Gower* (iv, p. xviii) and again in Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, pp. 66–67. Of the rental income Agnes was to receive, Macaulay says, 'He leaves to his wife Agnes £100 of lawful money, also, three cups, one 'cooper-culum', two salt-cellars and twelve spoons of silver, all the testator's beds and chests, with the furniture of hall, pantry and kitchen and all their vessels and utensils. One chalice and one vestment are left to the altar of the oratory belonging to his apartments (pro altare quod est infra oratorium ospicii mei).' Of the document bequeathing rental income to Agnes, 'He desires also that his wife Agnes, if she survive him, shall have all rents due for his manors of Southwell in the country of Northampton (?) and of Multoun in the county of Suffolk, as he has more fully determined in certain other writings given under his seal.' Fisher says, 'On February 16, 1410, Hugh Lutterall, a knight associated with Sir Arnold Savage and other of Gower's circle, granted Agnes Gower, late the wife of John Gower esquire, £20 yearly rent from his manors of Feltwell, Norfolk, and Multon, Suffolk. The manors were in the Lutterall fee, and Dame Elizabeth Lutterall had had to quitclaim them when Gower bought them in 1382. Here it would appear that her son or a relative had repurchased them, granting Agnes half the income that her husband had been getting' (p. 67).

<sup>4</sup> See Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*: 'The epitaph which Gower composed for her tomb, once beside his own in St. Mary's, shows something of his regard for her' (p. 65).

<sup>5</sup> The phrase is 'ubi etiam & eius uxor sepulchro, sed humiliori, conditur'. See John Leland, *Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis* [ca. 1540], 2 vols (Oxford: Theatro Sheldoniano, 1709), II, 415. Macaulay translates this as 'buried in a lower tomb' (iv, p. xxi), while Fisher translates it as 'where his wife is likewise entombed, but more humbly' (*John Gower*, p. 15). Later he describes Agnes's tomb as 'beside his [Gower's] own' (*ibid.*, p. 65).

living quarters at the Priory of St Mary Overeys without the customary publication of banns, that it was made possible by the special permission of the Bishop of Winchester, and that it occurred late in the poet's life.<sup>6</sup>

G. C. Macaulay and John H. Fisher have offered possible explanations for these special arrangements, the former suggesting that Agnes was not Gower's first wife, but rather his second, and the latter, countering that the poet's marriage was one of convenience, arranged out of necessity since he was 'old' 'blind' 'infirm', 'decrepit', and 'totally miserable'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the poet's declining health, a description provided by Gower himself, lends credulity to the unusual living arrangement of the newlywed couple in the Augustinian priory of St Mary Overeys where, as Fisher continues, 'the introduction of a woman into a monastic environment would have caused difficulties'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the absence of any mention of Agnes's family and the 'suggestive' nature of her surname — Groundolf — prompts Fisher to claim that Gower's interest in marriage so late in life must have been provoked out of need for a 'nurse' to care for him.

Proffered by eminent Gowerians such as Macaulay and Fisher, comments such as these have engendered subsequent speculation both on the couple's motives for marriage and Agnes's purpose in Gower's life. Rosamund S. Allen suggests, for example, that a cleric from one of the local parishes 'might have recommended as a servant for the aged Gower an intelligent girl from a poor family whom they might have been anxious to protect from the life of the brothels',<sup>9</sup> while R. F. Yeager asks whether Agnes's background could have 'initiated the request for a private wedding — a request the Bishop of Winchester might be likely to

<sup>6</sup> According to Fisher, Gower had been given the option of living at the priory after he had participated in its restoration after a fire in the distant past: 'In 1377 the church and priory were being restored from a fire that had ravaged Southwark a century and a half earlier. Leland held that this was the time at which Gower, "partly through his friends, who were numerous and powerful, and partly at his own expense, repaired the church and restored its ornaments". What would have been more natural than that he be granted permission to build personal apartments in the priory as part of his restoration?' (*John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, p. 58).

<sup>7</sup> *The Complete Works of John Gower*, IV. The description of Gower as 'old, blind [...] infirm of body, decrepit and totally miserable' (senex and cecus [...] corpus et egrotum, vetus et miserabilis totum) comes from his dedicatory epistle to Thomas Arundel in Oxford, All Souls College, MS 98, which precedes the *Vox Clamantis*. The *Cronica tripartita* is also found in this manuscript.

<sup>8</sup> Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Rosamund S. Allen, 'John Gower and Southwark: The Paradox of the Social Self', in *London and Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by Julia Boffey and Pamela King (London: Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies, 1995), pp. 111–47 (pp. 139–40).

grant, since several of the Southwark brothels were his rental properties' and whether it is 'significant that many of the prostitutes in Southwark were Flemish, as seemingly was Agnes'.<sup>10</sup> Without definitive documentation of the actual life of this woman called Agnes, of course, this line of speculation threatens to send us off in the wrong direction in search of a fire where there is no smoke. Yet at the same time its very persistence calls attention to the possibility that there is something out there waiting to be discovered. We need only recall the recent unveiling of the identity of Adam Pinkhurst and its effects on Chaucer studies to appreciate the efficacy of persistent questioning and relentless scholarly pursuit.<sup>11</sup> At the very least we need to pay attention to what Gower is saying about Agnes, however briefly he says it, if only for the value we know him to attach to fragments, whether of language, self, or society. For an exegetically savvy, post-Dantean poet such as Gower, historical fact is often deliberately written into other levels of meaning, all to be understood as components of the same vision.

My reading of what I am calling 'the Agnes fragments' is divided into three parts — historical, hagiographical, and philosophical — each defined as 'promiscuous' in order to indicate the discursive fields within which the subject operates and to suggest ways in which the eclectic combination of Gower's disparate genres (legal documents, tomb writing, and poetry) produce meaning. The first part combines a discussion of the sex trade known in Southwark with John and Agnes's personal history to suggest an alternative reading of the Gower marriage and its relation to the *Confessio Amantis*; the second explores the tropes of prostitution enacted in Gower's 'Tale of Apollonius' within the context of two saints' lives, one of St Agnes, the other of the legendary courtesan, Thaïs. That Gower's Thaise, the daughter of Apollonius sold into the brothels of Mitilene, bears a closer resemblance to St Agnes than to the courtesan for whom she is named offers a means by which we may better understand the shaping of Agnes Gower's identity and 'afterlife' by her husband. The third part of the essay revisits Gower's philosophy of common profit in relation to 'common women', the group upon whom the efficacy of redemption and charity may be tested. Whether Agnes was an actual prostitute, reformed by her marriage to Gower, is not my concern here since definitive documentation on that score has yet to be uncovered. Instead, what I offer is a reading of the Agnes fragments as an embodiment of the ethical vision of the *Confessio Amantis* and its potential for actualization in the world.

<sup>10</sup> R. F. Yeager, 'Gower in Winter: Last Poems' (paper presented at the MLA conference, December 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Linne Mooney, 'Chaucer's Scribe', *Speculum*, 81 (2006), 97–138.

### *Promiscuous Histories*

As every Gower scholar knows by now, Southwark, the district in which St Mary Overeys was situated, was a melting pot of varied constituencies, made up of a hybrid population diverse by sociopolitical status, occupational background, language, and custom.<sup>12</sup> Described as 'an alternative, and somewhat counter-cultural, suburb of the Cities of London and Westminster',<sup>13</sup> Southwark was home to a volatile blend of the sacred and the profane, the afflicted and the affected, the old and the young, the foreign and the domestic, and everything in between. As if marking the salvific potentiality of every man and every woman in this dynamic community, four parish churches — St Margaret, St George, St Olave, and St Mary Magdalene — were interspersed among other charitable institutions in the neighbourhood, including the priory hospital of St Thomas. And while the Bishop of Winchester's palace in all its opulent splendour appeared to impose ecclesiastical order on the local landscape, a history of violence pointed to other social realities, not the least of which was the seemingly random murder of Flemish immigrants during the urban warfare of 1381, an event that Gower allegorizes in Book I of the *Vox Clamantis*.<sup>14</sup>

Given this kind of communal volatility and synergism, it is not surprising to find a thriving sex trade operating under the very nose of the Bishop whose residence was in close proximity to Gower's own.<sup>15</sup> Ironic as it may seem to a

<sup>12</sup> As many scholars have noted, the Flemish were distinguished by their speech as well as by their characteristics and customs. Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London: Hamledon, 1996), especially chap. 9, 'The Stews and Prostitution', pp. 209–29; Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Regulation of the Brothels in Later Medieval England', in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett and others (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 100–33; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), *passim*; Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Bishop, Prioresse, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark', *Speculum*, 75 (2000), 342–88; Robert Epstein, 'London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower's Urban Contexts', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 43–60; John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta: Records and Memorials of his Life and Death', *ibid.*, pp. 23–41.

<sup>13</sup> Hines, Cohen, and Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta', pp. 23–41.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Johnson, *Southwark and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); William Rendle, *Old Southwark and its People* (Southwark: Drewett, 1878); Carlin, *Medieval Southwark*. Also see my essay 'Violence and the Sacred City: London, Gower, and the Rising of 1381', in *'Great Effusions of Blood': Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. by Mark Meyerson, Oren Falk, and Daniel Thiery (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 79–97.

<sup>15</sup> Karras's remarks are useful here: 'the bathhouses [in Southwark] were so notorious that by the middle of the fourteenth century a whole neighborhood in the liberty of the bishop of

postmodern audience, it was widely known at the time that the ecclesiastical establishment considered prostitution to be something of a social sewage system, useful to regulate the unpredictable contaminants associated with what many medieval thinkers deemed to be wayward sexuality. Captured in a famous analogy attributed to Thomas Aquinas, the rationale goes as follows: 'Prostitution in the towns is like the cesspool in a palace: take away the cesspool and the palace will become an unclean and evil-smelling place.'<sup>16</sup> Prostitution was recognized as a means by which the sanctity of marriage could be protected, aggressive and threatening sexual desire satisfied elsewhere. Yet tacit ecclesiastical acceptance of the sex trade was often at odds with civil authorities, and Southwark, with its brisk brothel business, was a site of ongoing conflict between competing clerical and secular interests. Located on the outskirts of London, the district functioned as the city's cesspool when it received those who were involuntarily compelled to leave. London officials apparently had little tolerance for the presence of sexual solicitation and expelled prostitutes and their cohorts by periodically closing down host establishments.<sup>17</sup>

Still, if Southwark was itself a welcoming venue for the profitable exchange of bodies, then the stews provided a choice marketplace wherein both domestic goods and merchandise as exotic as the select wines of France and the finest of Flemish textiles could be purchased by any discerning customer. As enterprising as other merchants in the district, brothel keepers, many of whom were allegedly women 'from the Low Countries', appear to have operated extensively in the trafficking of their female compatriots.<sup>18</sup> In the *Anonimalle Chronicle*, for in-

Winchester came to be called "Les Stuves". This is one of two jurisdictions in England where there were legal, officially sponsored brothels and the only one about which much information survives. That the brothels were legal within that jurisdiction — a liberty where the bishop in his capacity as territorial lord took the place of a municipal government — does not mean that church courts accepted them as legal: men were still prosecuted in an ecclesiastical court for visiting them' ('Regulation of the Brothels', p. 111).

<sup>16</sup> This statement allegedly originates with Augustine's *De ordine* and is a non-Thomistic continuation of *De regimine principum*, IV.14, in *Supplementum* to the *Index Thomisticus*, ed. by Roberto Busa, 7 vols (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1974–80). See Kelly, 'Bishop, Prioress, and Bawd in the Stews of Southwark', p. 343.

<sup>17</sup> Karras, 'Regulation of the Brothels', p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> See *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333–1381*, ed. by V. H. Galbraith, University of Manchester Historical Series, 45 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927), p. 140; *John Stow, A Survey of London*, ed. by Charles L. Kingsford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), p. 310. Karras adds: 'This quotation [Stow's] is a marginal rubric, which may have been inserted by the publisher of Stow's 1603 edition rather than by Stow himself. Trexler [...] has studied the

stance, a Southwark stewhouse said to be supervised by ‘frows de Flaundres’ was attacked during the Rising of 1381 for reasons that had as much to do with attitudes toward immigrants and their incursions into the native marketplace as it did with the regulation of the sex trade.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, twelve years after the event an ordinance that ‘specifically blamed “Flemish women, who profess and follow such shameful and dolorous life”’ was written into existence.<sup>20</sup>

The climate of hostility and xenophobia directed toward Flemish women associated with prostitution, as suggested by the ordinance mentioned above, is particularly significant in relation to Agnes Gower since her surname — Groundolf — according to Allen, ‘disguises a Flemish name’.<sup>21</sup> Allen’s suggestion that Agnes could have been a domestic servant working in Southwark away from the influence of her own family, whether by geographic distance or the conditions of employment, renders her eligible for rescue by someone like Gower. Yet so too could she have been in a position to orchestrate her own return to mainstream society, if in fact, there was a need. As Ann J. Kettle observes, young female immigrants ‘could acquire useful skills, accumulate their own dowries, and, free from family supervision, conduct their own courtships and enter into late, companionate marriages’.<sup>22</sup> Had Agnes been a Flemish immigrant, or Dutch or German for that matter,<sup>23</sup> she could very well have offered her services to the poet in exchange for marriage. Such a proposition would certainly have provided health care for the poet, as presumed by early Gower scholars, but more importantly

geographical origins of women in Florentine brothels, as well as male employees of the brothels (not male prostitutes), and finds that the largest group is from Flanders. While this may be coincidental, it may also be that Flemish women had a general reputation for prostitution or that prostitutes were called Flemish in slang even if they were not actually from Flanders’ (‘Regulation of Brothels in Late Medieval England’ (p. 117 n. 66)).

<sup>19</sup> The passage is as follows: ‘Mesme le iour de Corpore Christi en le matyne, les ditz comunes de Kent abaterount une measone destwes pres le pount de Loundres qe fuist en mayns del frows de Flaundres’ (*The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1333–1381*, p. 140).

<sup>20</sup> P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women in England, c. 1275–1525* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 211.

<sup>21</sup> Allen, ‘John Gower and Southwark’, p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> Ann K. Kettle, ‘Ruined Maids: Prostitutes and Servant Girls in Later Medieval England’, in *Matrons and Marginal Women in Medieval Society*, ed. by Robert R. Edwards and Vickie Ziegler (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1995), pp. 19–31.

<sup>23</sup> Karras, ‘The Regulation of Brothels’, p. 116 n. 64. Also Sylvia Thrupp, ‘Aliens in and around London in the Fifteenth Century’, in *Studies in London History*, ed. by A. E. J. Hollaender and William Kellaway (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), pp. 251–72 (especially p. 259).

perhaps would have indicated the poet's personal act of charity. Marriage to a prostitute, or even a woman thought to be a prostitute, was acknowledged as a viable means by which a conscientious man could contribute to the common good.<sup>24</sup>

Found in the records of William Wykeham, the Bishop of Winchester, the specifics of the Gower marriage mark it as atypical. Granted a special licence ('licensiam specialitem'), without the publishing of banns ('sine ulteriore bannorum editione'), the ceremony was performed outside the parish church to which the couple belonged ('extra ecclesiam parochiale') and in the oratory located in the poet's private living quarters in the Priory of St Mary Overeys ('in oratorio ipsius Joannis Gower infra [sic] hospicium cum in prioratu S. Mariae de Overeis in Suthwerk praedicta situatum').<sup>25</sup> Given this unusual set of circumstances, particularly in an era of heightened concern about clandestine nuptials, one can understand how the event could be construed as a marriage of convenience. Yet there is another possibility for the ceremony's atypical procedures and surroundings, one that rises above mutual self-interest or the sort of discretion required to maintain respectability and status in the community. The marriage between John and Agnes is as likely to have been a chaste marriage as an impersonal *quid-pro-quo*-type business transaction. Such an arrangement would have allowed the couple to devote themselves entirely to doing the work of God in their community while at the same time mitigating the gossipy innuendo that their living arrangement at St Mary Overeys is likely to have generated. So too would they be in a position to spend time in devotional activities and quiet contemplation as well as in the supervision of manuscript production (the *Confessio* was actively undergoing revision when the marriage took place). Moreover, when we recall that the home of John and Agnes was located in a religious establishment governed and occupied by Augustinian canons, a chaste marriage is all the more plausible since sexual activity, whether conjugal or not, was prohibited in sacred space.<sup>26</sup> This is the

<sup>24</sup> Karras, *Common Women*, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> In an early presentation of the document in *Notes & Queries*, W. H. Gunner claims that because marriage was granted to 'no less a man than the illustrious poet — the "moral Gower" — the interest attached to it [the document] is very much enhanced [...] and, though it may be perhaps an event of little importance, it is one which a faithful biographer would never omit to mention' (pp. 487–88).

<sup>26</sup> See *The Rule of St. Augustine: Masculine and Feminine Versions*, trans. by Raymond Canning (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1996). A rule against sex on the premises is not overtly stated, of course, but rather understood as a condition of membership in the religious community.

reason that Fisher comments on the ‘difficulties’ that a woman would have caused when introduced to the religious environment of St Mary Overeys.<sup>27</sup> That the nuptial arrangement could have been agreed upon for reasons pertaining to mutually determined marital chastity explains why the wedding was granted a special licence and performed by an upper-level ecclesiastical official whose services were required (above and beyond the duties of a parish priest) to sanction vows of marriage that had sacramental implications beyond the ordinary. Married couples who wanted ‘to maintain chastity in their homes’, according to Dyan Elliott, were ‘urged to make their vow into the hands of a bishop’.<sup>28</sup>

Although procreation is usually recognized as a primary goal of marriage, by Gower’s time matrimonial priorities had a long and confusing history in part because influential thinkers like Augustine thought mutual consent to be as important as consummation. Witness his statement in *De bono coniugali*:

The explanation why marriage is a good lies, I think, not merely in the procreation of children, but also in the natural compact itself between the sexes. If this were not the case, we would not now speak of marriage between the elderly; especially if they had lost their children, or had not had any at all. But as things stand, in a good marriage between elderly partners, though the youthful passion between male and female has withered, the ordered love between husband and wife remains strong. The better the couple are, the earlier they have begun by mutual consent to abstain from sexual intercourse, not because it had become physically impossible for them to carry out their wishes, but so that they could merit praise by prior refusal to do what they were capable of doing.<sup>29</sup>

Chaste marriage would not have been unprecedented by the late fourteenth century since mystics such as Birgitta of Sweden and her husband (and later Margery Kempe and her husband) would have been well known to other married couples struggling to find the right balance between the religious ideals of active social engagement and the ideals of sequestered contemplation, or what is more typically known as the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*.<sup>30</sup> Though the living quarters

<sup>27</sup> Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 163.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *De bono coniugali*, ed. and trans. by P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 7. See also Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll, ‘Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages: “It were to hire a greet merite”’, in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 103–22.

<sup>30</sup> As is well known, Margery was strongly influenced by the example set by Birgitta. See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech, Early English Text Society, o.s., 212 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940). Though it is not likely that Gower knew of her, the

at St Mary Overeys would not have been as strictly enclosed and rigorously separated from society as a conventional medieval cloister or double monastery would have been (at least in theory), it would have provided something of a sanctuary nonetheless, allowing a chastely married couple to minister to the community while maintaining a devotional space for retreat and study.

My contention that Gower's marriage to Agnes was of the chaste variety is predicated not only upon the unusual circumstances of their nuptials but upon the inscription on Agnes's tomb, proclaiming her to be, among other things, 'pious', 'charitable', and 'chaste of will':

Quam bonitas, pietas, elemosina, casta voluntas  
 Sobrietasque fides colverunt, hic iacet Agnes.  
 Uxor Amans, humilis Gower fuit illa Ioannis:  
 Donet ei summus celica regna Deus.  
 (She whom goodness, piety, charity, a chaste will  
 And sobriety have rendered faithful, here lies Agnes.  
 She was the loving wife of humble John Gower.  
 May the highest God bequeath her the heavenly kingdom.)<sup>31</sup>

Though one might argue that an epitaph composed by a husband for his wife is merely a convention of memorialization, within the context of the marital history that I am suggesting for the Gowers, such an inscription acquires additional meaning by constructing an afterlife for its subject, announcing a list of virtues by which a meritorious life may be assumed by a living audience; the goodness, the piety, the charity, the chaste will, even the sobriety, point to an exemplary woman, particularly in her role as wife.

In what I consider to be the most provocative component of the inscription, *uxor Amans* describes Agnes as a 'loving wife' while at the same time constructing a linguistic bond between this particular wife and the poet's persona, Gower's

model of marriage she forges fits into the paradigm of holy wedlock that I am suggesting for John and Agnes, with the proviso that Gower and Agnes transposed biological reproduction into creative production. The idea of the 'holy couple' as expressed in these two marriages may also include another sort of close relationship between religious men and women. In this category one might place Catherine of Siena and Raymond of Capua, Francis of Assisi and Clare, Benedict and his sister Scholastica, for example. Women who engaged in chaste marriages, such as Bridget, her own daughter Katherine, and later Margery Kempe, needed to know that conjugal sex and parturition did not preclude sanctity. One could consummate a marriage, even bear children, and still acquire membership in the holy community.

<sup>31</sup> My translation.

fictional lover — Amans. In a clever verbal manoeuvre Gower has inextricably bound this *uxor* not only to himself, but to his poetic persona. Read both ways simultaneously, the phrase — *uxor Amans* — signifies Gower's actual wife, and at the same time provides the means by which that wife appears to be intimately related to the poem's protagonist, if only visually.

Gower's use of 'uxor' rather than, say, 'mulier', is not to be understood as a demeaning stereotype of medieval gender roles, but rather as an acknowledgement of Agnes's significance in both the poet's life and art. An epitaph written on a tomb not only underscores the significance of this particular wife but, perhaps more importantly, endorses 'love' as the binding force of marriage. The question is what kind of love does Gower have in mind when the role he constructs for Agnes appears not to include the procreation of children? There is no evidence of progeny in the will or any of the other extant records. If the couple were childless, as the absence of documentation implies, then Agnes's status is more likely to have been as companion and friend, even moral guide, the person most likely to bring her husband back into the ethical fold should he stray, to pray for him at his death, to share the burdens of life with him, and to keep his memory alive. In this species of marriage wife and husband are not exclusively governed by laws of nature predicated upon sexual reproduction, or 'kinde' as it is described in the *Confessio*, but by the sort of 'ordered love', or 'natural compact between the sexes', proclaimed possible by Augustine in *De bono coniugali*.

This is the form of relationship that I believe Gower refers to when he introduces his notion of 'honeste love', as addressed by Genius in Books IV, VII, and VIII in his discussion of Sloth, Chastity, and Lechery.<sup>32</sup> Holding marriage to be the only form of love that provides equanimity to the lover, Genius punctuates his disquisition in Book IV with the 'Tale of Rosiphelee', a distracted young woman who needs to be goaded out of her amorous indifference; he challenges Amans's inability to take the initiative in attaining the love of his lady:

Bot thilke love is wel at ese,  
Which set is upon mariage;  
For that dar schewen the visage  
In alle places openly.

(CA, IV.1476-84)

<sup>32</sup> J. A. W. Bennett, 'Gower's "Honeste Love"', in *Patterns of Love and Courtesy: Essays in Memory of C. S. Lewis*, ed. by John Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 107-21.

Not only is marriage able to pacify desire in Genius's view in this early formulation, but it renders public those sorts of courtly relations more often kept clandestine and discrete; marriage allows the lover to go public, in other words, to settle his perpetual discontent, to remedy his dis-ease 'in alle places openly'. As Genius continues to guide Amans in his quest for amorous equanimity throughout the poem, his definition of 'honeste love' becomes increasingly bound to matrimony as the most effective way to provide relief from the debilitating symptoms of lovesickness.

In Book VII, Genius continues his thesis on marriage as the testing ground for the 'trouthe plight', of every good man:

Forthi scholde every good man knowe,  
And thenke hou that in mariage  
His trouthe plight lith in mortgage,  
Which if he breke, it is falshode,  
And that descordeth to manhode .

(ll. 4226–30)

Should a man break his 'trouthe plight', a vow that just as surely pertains to the payment of the conjugal debt as it does to marital fidelity (*morgage*), he incurs dishonour that 'descordeth to manhode'. Placed within the context of a discussion on chastity, as this passage is, Genius seems to endorse the laws of marriage that underwrite procreative necessity, one of the primary purposes of marital sex. Yet the notorious unreliability of Genius's advice on the subject of chastity, given his allegiances to Venus and Nature, prompts at least one scholar to redefine 'honeste love' as 'love that is obedient to the natural law, in the sense of the urge to reproduction, but that is modified by reason'.<sup>33</sup> The urge to procreate in this formulation, in other words, must be attenuated by reason to keep sexual desire under control, and if we recall Augustine's remarks, perhaps to sublimate it entirely.

By Book VIII, the tension between desire and reason appears to be resolved when Genius advises Amans to eschew 'al other love' and subscribe to the one form in which 'love and reason wolde accorde':

Forthi, my Sone, I wolde rede  
To lete al other love aweie,  
Bot if it be thurgh such a weie  
As love and reson wolde acorde.

<sup>33</sup> Conor McCarthy, 'Love and Marriage in the *Confessio Amantis*', *Neophilologus*, 84 (2000), 485–99 (p. 486).

For elles, if that thou descrode,  
 And tak lust as doth a beste,  
 This love mai noght ben honeste  
 (CA, 8.2020–26)

Genius's juxtaposition of two species of 'love', unmitigated lust, which transforms the lover into a 'beste', with its apparent opposite, 'honeste love', allows him to endorse (or appear to endorse) the species of love governed by reason. By poem's end, it becomes clear that the laws of marriage, including the possibility of marital chastity, constitute the means by which desire may be regulated legitimately.<sup>34</sup>

### *Promiscuous Hagiographies*

Since the Agnes fragments point to a woman whose identity is constructed around a particular name, it seems appropriate to suggest that St Agnes, the well-known virgin martyr, may have played a part in the shaping of Agnes Gower's identity.<sup>35</sup> As Gower himself has shown in his appropriation of John the Baptist's voice as it cries out from the wilderness in the *Vox Clamantis*, a person who bore the name of a saint could strongly identify with that saint. Just as Gower could assume the mantle of the prophet to animate his own voice, so too could a girl named for a virgin martyr, as Agnes Gower presumably was, perform *like* a saint; she could resist, speak out, or devise strategies of escape from lascivious advances and unwanted proposals should the need arise. Then, she could bravely face her persecutors and attain recognition after death, not by martyrdom in Agnes Gower's case, of course, but by marrying a poet who, like any able and conscientious hagiographer, could provide evidence of her qualifications for secular sainthood.

Of all the prostitute saints' legends on record, the one most relevant to a discussion of Gower's wife is the legend of St Agnes, not only for the similarity in name, but because the Agnes vita contains tropes of prostitution strikingly resonant in Gower's characterization of Thaise, who, like Agnes, is relegated to a brothel by forces beyond her control. Perhaps not surprisingly the Agnes legend follows a path of transmission akin to that of the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, the primary source for Gower's retelling of the 'Tale of Apollonius' in which the

<sup>34</sup> Ellen Shaw Bakalian, *Aspects of Love in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> See Anne B. Thompson, 'The Legend of St. Agnes: Improvisation and the Practice of Hagiography', *Exemplaria*, 13 (2001), 355–97.

Thaise episode appears, as it passes from its ancient sources into the Middle Ages.<sup>36</sup> The earliest of the Agnes legends is said to have been a Greek text written down by Damasus, which was followed by a Latin translation attributed to Ambrose, another Latin version by Prudentius, yet another by Aelfric in his *Lives of the Saints*, and another by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth-century *Legenda aurea*; the tale was then translated into English in the *South English Legendary*, Bokenham's *Legends of Holy Women*, and an early fifteenth-century play said to have been performed at Winchester.<sup>37</sup>

The version of the Agnes vita that Gower is most likely to have known appears in Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* where the story is told with particular emphasis on miraculous interventions without the more conventional devotional interludes indulged in by other hagiographers.<sup>38</sup> Unlike other saints, Jacobus's saints, according to Karen Winstead, 'show few traces of weakness', and demonstrate instead a strength of character and charismatic authority in the world that distinguish their narratives from others.<sup>39</sup> Added to a penchant for energetic characterization and storytelling talent, Jacobus's adroit rhetorical skill, his application of colours and figures allowed him to achieve optimum dramatic effect where needed. Nowhere is his artful rhetoric more evident than in the signature etymology of the saint's name found at the beginning of the narrative:

The name Agnes comes from *agna*, a lamb, because Agnes was as meek and humble as a lamb. Or her name comes from the Greek word *agnos*, pious, because she was pious and compassionate; or from *agnoscendo*, knowing, because she knew the way of truth. Truth, according to Augustine, is opposed to vanity and falseness and doubting, all of which she avoided by the virtue of truth that was hers. When she was thirteen years old, she lost death and found life. Childhood is computed in years, but in her immense wisdom she was old; she was a child in body but already aged in spirit. Her face was beautiful, her faith more beautiful.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991).

<sup>37</sup> Jane Cowling, 'A Fifteenth-Century Saint Play in Winchester: Some Problems of Interpretation', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 13 (2001), 19–33; see also Virginia Burrus, 'Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995), 25–46.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), I, 101–04.

<sup>39</sup> Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp. 101–04. I have taken the liberty of paraphrasing much of the text that follows.

That Jacobus associates the meaning of the virgin's name with the 'meek and humble' creature that becomes the most symbolic of sacrificial animals makes for a striking introduction to an etymology that establishes her qualifications for sainthood from the beginning. Agnes's name connotes piety and the kind of knowing that leads to the ultimate Truth of Revelation, an analogy that imbues the martyr with a preternatural knowledge akin to the Lamb Himself. Moreover, the use of chiasmus as a rhetorical strategy — life equals death, death, life; young equals old, old, young — sets the stage for transformation and transcendence beyond the material world. Surely this dramatic rhetorical ploy would appeal to a poet whose penchant for paradox and lexical puzzles (such as Gower/Amans and *senex/puer*) is so prominently demonstrated in his own work.

Jacobus's narration begins with a young man's indecent proposal to the pubescent Agnes on her way home from school. When she spurns his lascivious advances, telling him that she is betrothed to one 'far nobler' of greater kin and 'dignity' than he, the boy is driven into a state of despair comparable to the most dedicated of courtly lovers, not unlike Gower's Amans. His grief is so profound and so prolonged that his father, the prefect, intervenes, requesting the virgin to reconsider the proposal his son has made, however indecent. When she refuses, the insulted administrator offers the girl a choice of two modes of punishment — to be sacrificed to the pagan goddess Vesta, or to be 'thrown in with harlots and handled as they are handled'. When Agnes refuses the former punitive scenario, she is publically stripped, but as she is taken off to the brothel a miraculous growth of hair 'better than any clothing' covers her nakedness. Soon, however, she is cast unceremoniously into the brothel chamber which, by the logic of hagiography, is immediately transformed into a place of purgation; those who enter the premises to bereft the virgin of her maidenhood emerge 'cleaner' than they were before thanks to an intervening divine ray of light. His plans thwarted, the angry prefect condemns Agnes to a fiery death, but when the blaze set for her immolates the hostile crowd instead it becomes apparent that they are implicated in the persecution; having participated in an attempt to desecrate a holy virgin, they have committed an act that undermines the moral cohesiveness of the entire community.

St Agnes's chastity, her resistance to worldly desires, and her subsequent martyrdom jettison her into the realm of the sacred, making possible a mystical marriage, the ultimate goal of *all* virgin martyr narratives, one might say. But a mystical marriage to the Godhead is quite obviously *not* a human marriage, and there still exists a notable gap between the account of this particular saint's life and Agnes Gower, the woman presumably named for her. The saint's narrative itself does not clarify what the mystical marriage of a virgin martyr could possibly

mean to a woman married to an aging poet in the late fourteenth century. The whole point of the legend is, after all, to demonstrate how an otherwise disempowered woman such as St Agnes prior to her ordeal could have achieved the status necessary to become a popular exemplar.

When related to the concerns raised about Agnes Gower within the promiscuous contexts I have been mapping out in this article, the poet's wife acquires additional signifying value, symbolic meaning nearly equivalent to that of the saint. She is, after all, 'pious', 'chaste in will', filled with 'goodness', and strongly associated with prostitution, if only by circumstantial evidence. Yet a single narrative, even one that replicates Agnes's name, neither completes her story nor provides definitive answers as to how she fits into the larger scheme of things. Just as a childhood anecdote, or a photo of an important occasion, or a cherished artefact provide a more comprehensive picture of a beloved friend or family member, so too the meaning of Agnes's life, rendered only partially knowable by documentary fragments, inscriptions on tombs, bequests in wills, and the suggestive allusions to a saint can be more fully comprehended with the addition of another narrative. For that I turn to the legend of Thaïs, a narrative whose protagonist bears resemblance to Gower's Thaise, if in name only.

As many scholars have pointed out, one of the notable changes that Gower makes to the 'Tale of Apollonius', is in the name of his female protagonist, Apollonius's daughter, Thaise. While in the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, the character is named Tarsia, after the city (Tarsus) in which she is raised to early adolescence by foster parents, in Gower's hands she is transformed. No longer linked to the name of a corporate entity, she is associated instead with the legendary Egyptian courtesan of the same name — Thaïs; that is, however, where the similarities between the two protagonists appear to end.<sup>41</sup> Unlike Gower's Thaise, the famous prostitute is neither a virgin nor a pious innocent when her narrative commences. Rather, she is a firmly committed sex worker with an established clientele and a thriving practice.

Set in Egypt at the time of the desert saints, Thaïs's story begins with a description of her extraordinary pulchritude and the violent rivalries carried out at her doorstep by clients competing for her favours. When her notoriety reaches the ear of a monk named Paphnutius, he decides to test his powers of persuasion and, disguised as a paying client, gains entry into Thaïs's resplendently decorated bed-chamber. As Paphnutius soon discovers, however, Thaïs is no ordinary courtesan. Rather, she demonstrates what appears to be an innate knowledge of the Christian

<sup>41</sup> Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*.

God, an afterlife, and the tortures awaiting the unrepentant. When the startled monk asks why she has participated in acts she knows to be sinful, especially when she fully comprehends the consequences of her actions, she beseeches him to impose upon her the harshest penance he can imagine; when he agrees, the new penitent carries her ill-gotten gain to the middle of the city where, under the watchful eyes of a milling throng, she sets fire to the incriminating heap and urges her clientele to public confession. Thaïs's subsequent penance — three-years' enclosure in a fetid cell — provides the atonement necessary to render her into an icon of the reformed prostitute nearly equivalent to Mary Magdalene.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike St Agnes, Thaïs's sins are construed not merely as repeated acts of prostitution but as an excessive accumulation of wealth, a result of her discriminating choice of, 'whichever lover paid her most'.<sup>43</sup> The challenge set before her then is to accept a mode of penance commensurate with the gravity of her sins, not only those of a sexual nature but those considered to have an economic impact on the community. Indeed, the acquisition of material wealth, exposed in this narrative by the cause and effect relationship drawn between prostitution and the ardent participation and support by its male clientele, is a motif also found in the legend of St Agnes, though with a subtle difference. While the Thaïs legend dramatically emphasizes the scene of public expiation that explicitly exposes a heretofore hidden system of monetary exchange — the prostitute's hoarding and the unregulated spending of her clientele — the emphasis in the Agnes legend turns to the clients exposed for their role in the undermining of social morality. And while both saints may be understood as corporate whistle-blowers of a sort, Thaïs publicly exposes the booty that might have been put to good use if circulated freely within the city, while Agnes exposes the underlying sexual motives compelling the sex trade. In both narratives, the men who solicit the prostitute's services are rendered explicitly culpable for the demise of communal well-being.

The discrepancy between Gower's Thaise and the legendary courtesan has been noted by scholars though not in recognition of the role that the Agnes

<sup>42</sup> See Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1987). Ward offers a reading of the legend as foregrounding repentance: 'Thaïs is sealed into a cell as if into a tomb, a limitation down to one point of reality before God; and this is enforced by her one prayer, "You who made me, have mercy upon me". Creature before creator, sinner before saviour, she is shown as experiencing the escape from illusion, untruth, self-determination, hardness and the inability to love or be loved, alone and in darkness through three years. A shock-treatment, perhaps but not imposed by alien cruelty; it was asked for and given out of love' (pp. 80–81).

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1990), 3–32.

legend is likely to have played in Gower's portrayal.<sup>44</sup> As Kurt Olsson observes, for instance, 'unlike the harlot Thaïs [... Gower's Thaise] displays a wonderful strength in resisting all the young men forced upon her in the brothel'.<sup>45</sup> Referring to her as an 'antitype of Boethius's harlot muses',<sup>46</sup> Olsson sees Gower's Thaise as a figure more closely resembling Lady Philosophy than the infamous prostitute whose name she bears. Certainly, Thaise's innate problem-solving skills, her education and resourcefulness render her eligible for inclusion in the category of 'honeste women', rather than among the common women of Mitilene. After all, she proves herself to be a source of therapeutic remembrance to the grieving Apollonius when she triggers the mourning king's psychological recovery and re-entrance into the world of political action. What accounts for the discrepancy between the Thaïs narrative and Gower's Thaise, then, is the presence of the Agnes legend.

The episode of the Apollonius tale most relevant to my discussion occurs after Thaise has been abducted by pirates and sold into the vigorous sex trade on the island of Mitilene.<sup>47</sup> When several young men answer the brothel owner's chal-

<sup>44</sup> Oswald Robert Kuehne, 'A Study of the Thais Legend with Special Reference to Hrotsvitha's "Paphnutius"' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1922). See also Diane Van Hoof, 'The Saint and the Sinner: Hrotsvit's Pafnutius and Anatole France's Thaïs', in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Rare Avis in Savonia?*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), pp. 263–74; Keith V. Sinclair, 'The Translations of the *Vitas patrum*, *Thaïs*, *Antichrist*, and *Vision de saint Paul* Made for Anglo-Norman Templars: Some Neglected Literary Considerations', *Speculum*, 72 (1997), 741–60. For an edition of the plays, see R. C. D. Perman, 'Henri d' Arci: the Shorter Works', in *Studies in Medieval French Presented to Alfred Ewert in Honour of his Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 279–321. Henri d' Arci was the patron of the four above-named Anglo-Norman translations made for the Templar knights. There is a historical link between his descendants and the foundation of an Augustinian priory dedicated to Mary Magdalene.

<sup>45</sup> Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the 'Confessio Amantis'* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), especially chap. 18, pp. 215–25.

<sup>46</sup> Olsson, *John Gower*, p. 221.

<sup>47</sup> The trope of abduction is widespread in genres other than hagiography. An interesting early variation appears in Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* as a rhetorical exercise. The narrative of 'Sacerdos prostituta' concerns, according to Elizabeth Archibald, 'a would-be Vestal Virgin who claimed to have preserved her virginity during a forced sojourn in a brothel. Many clients visited her room, she says, but all were moved by her entreaties and gave her generous presents of money, except for one rough soldier whom she was compelled to kill in self-defence [...]. The question is whether she is fit to be a Vestal Virgin, or whether she is lying and has been polluted' (*Apollonius of Tyre*, p. 36). For a follow-up discussion on the prostitute saint narrative, see also Lorraine Helms, 'The Saint in the Brothel: Or, Eloquence Rewarded', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41 (1990), 319–32.

lenge to deflower the virgin, their attempts are thwarted by Thaise's divinely induced storytelling:

Clos in a chambre be hireselve,  
 Ech after other ten or tuelve  
 Of yonge men to hire in wente;  
 Bot such a grace God hire sente,  
 That for the sorwe which she made  
 Was non of hem which pouer hade  
 To don hire eny vileinie.

(*CA*, viii.1425–31)

The parallels between Gower's narration of Thaise's ordeal and the St Agnes narrative are striking. Both are virgins; both are educated young women; both are accosted by strangers and sent to a brothel; both resist the advances of hopeful clients; both receive divine aid in that endeavour. Like St Agnes, Gower's Thaise emerges from the brothel unscathed and undefiled, ready to be transformed into another sort of exemplar for the community. But while St Agnes is martyred, Gower's Thaise is transformed into a teacher whose task is to instruct young noblewomen in medieval science.

### *Promiscuous Philosophies*

Common profit, as used in Gower's work, has been defined by Russell Peck as 'the mutual enhancement, each by each, of all parts of the community for the general welfare of that community taken as a whole'.<sup>48</sup> The idea, which evolved from Cicero's notion of the common good as outlined in *De officiis*, posited a kinship between a man's duty and his virtue. The role of the virtuous man, in Cicero's view, is to perform the duties directed toward the regulation of everyday life, especially in the rendering of justice. For this the Roman rhetorician cites two purposes: 'to keep one man from doing harm to another unless provoked by wrongs done to himself' and to 'encourage men to use the common possessions of the community for the common interest, private property for their own'.<sup>49</sup> At first glance, the inclusion of common women in a philosophy of the common

<sup>48</sup> Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1978), p. xxi.

<sup>49</sup> *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350–c.1450*, ed. by J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 311.

good seems counterintuitive particularly in view of the potential of the sex trade to provoke disruption and rivalry rather than to promote mutual enhancement of all components of community. Given the medieval understanding of 'common women' as women owned by all men in common, disruption and rivalry seem rather more likely than peaceful coexistence.<sup>50</sup> Yet if we understand common women not to be women who capitalize on the sale of their bodies, but to represent the potential for reformation and change for *all* people in a dynamic society, the initial discomfiture may be mitigated if not overcome completely. Certainly the poet's attitude concerning the women of the stews whom he castigates indiscriminately along with their clients in the *Speculum meditantis* and the *Vox Clamantis* changes over time to the affirmative portrayal of Thaise in the *Confesio*.<sup>51</sup> The poet appears to have recognized by the late 1380s that the contribution working women could make to society had more to do with their transformation into teachers of the daughters of noblemen rather than to their function as safety valves for the social sewage system.<sup>52</sup> The education of women, and their potential

<sup>50</sup> Karras, *Common Women*, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> See *Mirour de L'Omme*, trans. by William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues, 1992). 'Every day of the week, behold, Wantonness leads her life near the stews. Very basely she drags out her life there, where she is every man's companion, caring nought to what class he belongs. Indeed, to tell the truth, she is ready and waiting for him: she offers herself and gladly permits his work. But surely it is a vile misdeed when she trades on her body, selling and bargaining her flesh. Not everyone can keep a foolish whore from wantonness when she is inflamed with wanton love. But if it happens that she can enjoy herself without danger, at ease, without snares, she takes much greater pleasure in whatever wanton love she can imagine in her heart. When a whore lies with her lecher, they often contrive such wantonness that they should be much ashamed of it' (p. 127, ll. 9205–28). In Book VI of *Vox Clamantis* where he speaks 'still further about the same thing, namely, how others have arisen in place of those who in days gone by were chaste and steadfast', he laments that 'Penelope is dead, as is Lucretia of Rome, and Circe and Calypso rule their counterparts. Justine, who scorned wicked lusts, has now passed away, and Thais is lying flat on her back' (VI.22). See Eric Stockton, *Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 252.

<sup>52</sup> John Stow, *The Survey of London* (London: Dent, 1912) lists several schools in the area. 'The third school seemeth to have been in the monastery of St. Saviour, at Bermondsey in Southwark; for other priories, as of St. John by Smithfield, St. Bartholomew in Smithfield, St. Mary Overie in Southwark, and that of the Holy Trinity by Aldgate, were all of later foundation, [than St Paul's and St Peter's at Westminster] and the friaries, colleges, and hospitals, in this city, were raised since them [sic] in the reigns of Henry III, Edward I, II., and III. etc. All which houses had their, though not so famous as these first named' (p. 67). Also, it is noteworthy that there was a foundation narrative attached to St Mary Overie. Legend has it that 'there was a nunnery on the site, founded in the seventh century and converted in the ninth century by St. Swithun, Bishop of Winchester, into a secular college'. See John Hines, et al., 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta' (p. 28).

to contribute to the common good in some way, runs as a leitmotif throughout the poem; held to the same, if not higher, moral standard than their male counterparts, women are bequeathed the ability to rescue them as often as they themselves are rescued. The precocious fourteen-year-old Peronelle in the 'Tale of Three Questions', for instance, saves the life of her intellectually incapacitated father by answering questions he finds incomprehensible.<sup>53</sup> Gower extends that precedent to Thaise's trumping of enfeebled masculine wit when she relies upon her own brand of resourcefulness. Chaste of will and determined to retain her bodily integrity she literally talks her would-be rapists out of their purpose. Gower's Thaise disrupts established categories for women — virgin, wife, mother, whore — and in doing so opens the door to reconceptualizations of Woman and the possibility of enfolding *actual* women into actual medieval communities.

That the *Confessio* is an exploration of the medieval concept of marriage as enacted in spheres of governance from the simplest household to the household of the king has become something of a commonplace in Gower scholarship.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, when Apollonius is separated from his family, the city he governs devolves into mourning and chaos, signifying the relationship between a king's personal loss and the effect of that loss on his subjects. Conversely, when Apollonius's reunion with his lost family (daughter and wife) occurs, 'good' governance is re-established not only in Pentapolim where the couple returns, but in Tyre, where Thaise, having married Athenagoras, the Governor of Mitilene, assume power. One might say that everything touched by the noble and wise king, once he has returned to his senses, is merely the inevitable demand of medieval romance, but the fact that neither the marriage of Apollonius nor the marriage of Thaise is endogamous reveals another underlying principle of human society, one that Gower incorporates into the philosophical themes of the poem. By juxtaposing marital union with re-union (Thaise/Athenagoras, Apollonius and his wife) and contrasting the two against the incestuous relation of Antiochus and his daughter, the poet exposes an ethical conundrum that may be applied to all spheres of human interaction from the most intimate and personal to the most public and influential — the necessity of marrying outside the kinship group.

One might also read a marked interest in the exogamous relations emerging from incest taboos not only as they influence the poem but as they relate to the

<sup>53</sup> Located at the end of Book I, it is, as Russell A. Peck points out, a 'summary tale' with a strong parallel in 'the Tale of Apollonius' in Book VIII (*Confessio Amantis*, I, 36).

<sup>54</sup> See Jenny Rebecca Rytting, 'In Search of the Perfect Spouse: John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* as a Marriage Manual', *Dalhousie Review*, 82.1 (2002), 113–26.

poet's marriage to a foreign woman. That incest taboos compel people to marry outside their genealogical group is rather evident, a means by which the human gene pool may be broadened and invigorated, to put it in more modern terms. Yet the injunctions intended to safeguard the family, as Georgiana Donavin observes, actually 'create the desires precipitating its [the family's] destruction'.<sup>55</sup> When we realize that this is precisely the action that Gower has taken by marrying a foreign woman both outside his kinship group and outside his community affiliations, representation and actual life suddenly converge. In his promotion of marriage as a union predicated upon a form of love that is governed by reason, the poet has successfully rendered marital chastity not only possible but desirable. What substitutes for progeny from the marriage of John and Agnes are documentary fragments, legal records, an inscription on a tomb, and a personal narrative alluding to a saint.

The final act that bears mentioning in relation to the poet's philosophical views is when Gower makes Agnes the executrix of his will. Her inclusion among four notable men indicates literacy in Latin, a possibility that renders her a qualified candidate for an unofficial teaching position at St Mary Overeys or inclusion among the 'honest women' in the district.<sup>56</sup> The integration of repentant prostitutes, disenfranchised foreign women, unmarried or destitute women forced into dire situations back into the social matrix of a needy local economy would surely test the limits of charity and serve as a constant reminder of the necessity for ethical governance at all levels of society. Likewise, the education of young women, an agenda that Gower seems to have supported given his portrayal of Thaise and other female characters in the *Confessio*, would have rendered imaginable the contributions of displaced and/or socially disadvantaged women to the community. Perhaps these are the possibilities that the poet sees worth indicating if ever so fleetingly in strategic legal documents and an epitaph naming Agnes and her personal virtue. Gower's Agnes fragments implore the living not to ignore this woman's presence, but to proclaim her significance along with those who dedicate their lives to the production of good works, whether in poetry or acts of social conscience.

<sup>55</sup> Georgiana Donavin, 'Taboo and Transgression in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. by Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin, and Merrall L. Price (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 94–121 (p. 96).

<sup>56</sup> The Austin canons of St Mary Overeys were bequeathed a missal and a martilogium for the chapel of St John the Baptist as well as a chalice and vestments for use in the oratory in which the couple had married.

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